

Lisa Goes to Hogwarts

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Summary: The adventures of descendants of the characters, 150 years in the future.

1. In the beginning....

> <meta name="ProgId"> Chapter 1

Lisa Goes to Hogwarts

_For someone who will probably never read this story, but if you do
â€" thank you for everything._

My mother had blonde hair and blue eyes. My father has brown hair and blue eyes. And I have red hair and brown eyes.

It was in May, shortly before my eleventh birthday, that I discovered genetics. My science class learned about Mendel's pea-plant experiments, and our teacher mentioned the fact that two blue-eyed people cannot have a brown-eyed child. I'd never known that, and first I thought my teacher must just be wrong. But I went to the library, and got a book on genetics, and sure enough, she was right. I was shocked, to say the least. All sorts of scenarios kept going through my head, and I wondered which was true. I couldn't just say to my mother, 'am I adopted?' or 'Hey, mom, who is my real dad?'. So I left the genetics book open to the part about eye color and went to my room.

A couple hours later, mom came in. She shut the door and showed me the book.

"I found this downstairs," she said.

"I left it there for you." I said. "Did you read that?"

"Yes."

"So what's the deal?" She looked at me and sighed.

"First of all, you are my daughter. It's just that your father is really your stepfather. When I was very young, only twenty, I married foolishly. I left a month after your birth."

"Why?"

"Because," she hesitated. "Because your father - was evil. He wasn't - there was something wrong with him."

"Was he a criminal?"

"No-o, he never actually did anything that would get him arrested. But I don't want to talk about it." She stood up and tried to leave.

"Mother? What's my real name?"

"Your name is Lisa Smith. That's your legal name." Smith, of course, was my stepfather's name. I wondered who my true father had been, and what he had been that was so bad.

I shared a room with Emily, my sister. She was about nine at the time and very curious. Every night, I'd have to tell her stories to get her to go to sleep. That started when she was about four. By the time she was six, I had run out of stories to tell her. So one day I went to the library and asked for a book of children's stories. I took it home and was reading it when my mother snatched it from me.

"You know our rules!" she yelled. She didn't let me read anything but 'realistic' books. No fantasy, no science fiction, nothing but historical fiction and dumb books about the miseries of third grade. I tried to tell her that these were classic fairy stories that I already knew anyway, but she didn't listen.

Anyway, after that, I decided that whatever she said, I was going to read those books anyway. So every day at school I'd check out a book and read it over lunch. I became a very good reader, but didn't make many friends.

That was the reason that I was late walking home from school that day in late May. I'd stayed to finish 'The Hobbit', a wonderful story that I just couldn't put down. Now it was about four in the afternoon. Mom wouldn't care - she would think I was with friends. As long as I was home for dinner, I'd be fine.

I was crossing an asphalt basketball court when I realized that someone was following me. It was a man, with black hair and eyes. This made me a little nervous. Mom had told all of us kids about people who kidnapped children, and this man might be one of them. He was on the other side of the high fence surrounding the court, though, and there were four or five boys playing. I thought I'd be safe while I was here. So I stood and watched the boys play.

"Lisa?" the man called. I turned. "Yes, it is you! Lisa, I've found you!"

"Who are you?" I asked. I had my book bag in one hand. I was ready to throw it and run at a moment's notice.

"Lisa- it's me. Your father." I gasped. I went closer to the fence.

"You're my father?" I looked at him. He did look a bit like me... he pulled out a locket from his pocket. He tossed it to me. I opened it. There was a photograph of a man -this one, but younger, and a woman, who, I realized, was my mother. She was holding an infant in her arms.

"That's me?" I was, of course, skeptical. Yet something in me seemed to say, _yes, yes, this is him!_

"Yes." I looked at the picture again. _That's funny, _I thought. _I could have sworn that it was different before._ I closed it and gave it to him.

"Can we go and talk somewhere?" he asked me. I thought for a minute. If he were a kidnapper or some such I wanted people to be around so they could help me. If notâ€¦ well, I had to hear what he had to say.

"There's a park a few blocks away." There'd be people there. It would be safe enough, I hoped.

We sat on the park bench and looked at ducks on the river. The man â€“_my_ _father_? â€” seemed to be waiting for me to make the first move. Finally, I said,

"If you're my father, why haven't you come before?"

"Because I didn't know where you were, Lisa. Your mother came here- to America - and I was looking in England."

"That's where you live?" He did have an accent, it was true.

"That's where you were born."

"So, what's your name?"

"Your mother hasn't told you?" He looked shocked, then grinned ruefully as if he should have expected no more.

"She won't tell me anything." I didn't mean for my words to be so bitter; they just slipped out.

"My name is Patrick Black."

"So I am Lisa Black," I said slowly. I liked the sound of it. "Why did mother leave?"

"When she found out, she couldn't take it."

"Found out what?" What horrible secret did my father conceal? I knew somehow, without any further proof, that this man was my father. It might have been his smile; I'd seem the same smile looking out of mirrors and lakes at me a thousand times. Or it might have been the conviction his voice held.

"That I'm a wizard. You're one too." The gasp I gave out then shocked

even me.

"You're joking, aren't you?" How could this be real? How could he make such a joke in such a deadpan way?

"No." He pulled out a wand from his pocket, mumbled something, and waved it. An ice cream appeared. He handed it to me. "You like chocolate?"

"Yes," I said, taking it. I bit into it. It really was ice cream. I was convinced â€" I had always, secretly, believed in magic. "I'm a wizard too?"

"Well, technically, you're a witch. But yes. I have confirmation here." He handed me a letter. I opened it. It was from a wizard school called Hogwarts, inviting me to go.

"Wow," I breathed, reading the letter again and again.

"So, you want to go?" He seemed anxious for me to agree, and there was nothing I'd rather do.

"Yes, of course!" I grinned. Then I thought of something. "But mom won't let me, will she?"

"She's had you for almost eleven years. Don't you think it's my turn?" There was that grin again, a bit mischievous, promising me so much.

"Oh, yes! But, how will you get her to let me go?"

"You could just run away. That might be simplest." I laughed. "What?"

"It's just that - that's kid-logic. I've never heard an adult talk that way."

"Well, it makes sense, doesn't it?" I liked my dad already.

"Yes. Okay, how about tonight?"

"That's perfect. I know where you live, I'll be by at midnight."

"But what if they hear me?" He handed me a blue pouch of some powder.

"Put this in the drinks at dinner â€" and drink this yourself first." He handed me another packet, this one red. "It's a Sleeping Draught. Everyone in the house will sleep for twelve hours. Nothing will wake them. The other package is an antidote. Just don't mix them up."

"Oh, that's wonderful!"

"You'd better hurry. It's getting late." I hugged him and ran home. I hardly ate any dinner, and I didn't drink anything at all, just to be safe.

It seemed forever before my sisters began to fall asleep, but then

suddenly they and my mother and stepfather were all sleeping. I grinned and tiptoed up to my room and put some clothes in a suitcase. Then I got a picture of my family and stuffed that in too. Next, I took a piece of paper and started to write.

_Dear Mom, _

I'm running away from home to live with my father and become a witch. I looked at what I'd written. A little blunt, but that's what I wanted to say. _I love you all very much, but I really want this. I hope to see you again sometime. Until then, I am _

_Your Daughter, _

Lisa Smith Black.

I left it on my bed where she'd see it. Then I started to wait. Finally midnight was only a few minutes away. I went outside and sat on the curb waiting.

At midnight, a car pulled up. I opened the door. Dad grinned at me.

"Get in."

"A bit ordinary of a car for a wizard, don't you think?"

"Maybe, but it'll get us where we need to be. There's more to it than meets the eye."

"Are we taking a plane to England?" I asked.

"No, I've got contacts at the Ministry of Magic who've got contacts at the Bureau of Wizardry here in America. It's all arranged."

Anyway, it was late, and I was tired. I tried to keep my eyes open, but I just kept getting sleepier and sleepier...

"Lisa! Wake up!"

"Huh?" I looked around. I was sitting in the car, which had just stopped outside a huge old house.

"We're home," my father said.

"We live here?" I stared at the mansion. The gates were covered in ivy and it was made of brick and stone.

"Yes." Dad looked at it and sighed. "It's been in our family for years! It may be a little empty with just the two of us, but that's okay." He took me inside and led me upstairs. "This will be your room. We'll go shopping soon to get you things, but you might want to sleep a little more now. I'll have breakfast ready when you come down." He shut the door, and I looked around the room. It was almost as big as the living room of my old house. There was a large four-poster bed with a silk canopy, and a bay window that had a seat that would be perfect for reading in. Big doors opened onto the lawn, and I saw a forest and a lake through them. I lay down on the bed and sighed. I loved it here already.

I awoke to the heavenly smell of bacon and maple syrup. Quickly, I went downstairs to join my father. He gave me a plate and we sat down together. We ate in silence for a while, then he said,

"I'm glad we have a few months before school starts. There's lots of stuff you need to know about us."

"Like what?" I wanted to know everything about my father, about wizards, about "well, about everything.

"Well, there's lots I can tell you, and we have a huge library here. Do you like to read?"

"I love it! But mom never let me read anything interesting." Again a surliness crept into my voice without my meaning it to.

"I think you'll find some of what's here interesting indeed. But we'll do that later. Today - today I'm going to teach you to fly." Dad grinned mischievously. "You'll love it, I promise. It's in our blood."

He led me outside ("Just leave the dishes - we can do them later") to a wide meadow. I breathed in the fresh air. He showed me two brooms that were lying on the ground.

"This is a very good broom, the Nimbus line. You won't be allowed to take it to school this year, of course, but you can learn to use it." He had me stand by one. Then he yelled, 'Up!' and the broom by him leapt into his hand. I tried it, but the broom just lay there. Dad laughed, but kindly. "Try again, and don't be afraid. It won't bite you."

So again I yelled, "Up!" and this time it came.

"Excellent! Now, you get on like this, and you hold it here," he said, showing me. "Then you push off - gently. When you want to come down, point it slightly downward and you'll come down slowly." He demonstrated. "Want to try?" I nodded. I pushed off, rose ten feet in the air, and came down. I grinned at Dad.

"Excellent! Try this." He showed me more. Ten minutes later, I was soaring a hundred feet off the ground, diving and whooping. Flying is like nothing else on earth. When your feet leave the ground, you feel -well, you feel just grand. You can't help but exult in the feeling. It's like Christmas and birthdays and warm cocoa in winter and the day you make your best friend and sunshine and music and your first kiss all rolled up in one. I didn't think I'd ever have enough of it. But Dad called a stop to it after an hour or so.

"Weather's turning nasty. We'd best go in." So I followed him, broom over my shoulder, into the house. He took me on a tour then, showing me all the rooms and things that we had. The last place he took me was the library.

"You can use this as often as you want," he said as he threw the door open. I looked in.

The room was hundreds of feet in every direction. Bookshelves lined the walls, except for where huge windows stood to let in air and

light. There were thousands and thousands of books there. Chairs were scattered here and there across the marble floor, and a huge stone fireplace stood at one end. I gaped.

"You might try these first," my dad said, leading me to a shelf. "These are biographies about a very famous wizard. I think you might learn a lot from them." He pointed to a row of books. "_The Harry Potter Series: Harry: The Boy Who Lived, Harry at Hogwarts, Harry, Ron and Hermione, Harry Faces You-Know-Who, Harry and the Weasleys, Harry: Quidditch Seeker_. That's a lot."

"There are more, too. You may see some of our ancestors in there."

"Really?"

"Yes. Actually, you might try _Moony, Padfoot and Prongs; Their Story_. That's got a lot about our most famous ancestor. Sirius Black was his name. He's famous for being the only person ever to escape Azkaban unassisted. That's wizard prison."

"What did he do?" I was shocked. Dad seemed proud to have such a notorious ancestor.

"Nothing, but they thought he did. Anyway, they got it all straightened out eventually."

"Wow. It sounds like I have a lot to learn." But was I excited to start learning it.

"And you want to get started, right? Well, when you get hungry, come on down to the kitchen and we'll have dinner." Dad seemed to understand me better after one day with me than my mother ever had. I grinned at him.

"Today's been perfect, Dad."

"We've got a lot more days just like it, Lisa." He looked down at me, then bent his knees so his face was on a level with mine. "All your life, I've missed you, Lisa. Now you're here with me â€" and I couldn't be happier. I promise you your life here will be wonderful."

"It already is."

A week later, I came down to breakfast.

"What do you want to do today?" Dad asked me.

"I guess what I've been doing," I said. "Why, did you want to do something special?"

"Well, I thought that since it was your birthday..." He was grinning. It seemed to be the trademark Black grin; in the books I'd read with our ancestors in, most wore that same expression quite often. It was a devilish sort of grin, the sort that makes you feel good and nervous at the same time. The grin of someone who might do almost anything â€" except something evil. But the impact of his words hit me.

"My birthday! I lost track of the days!"

"I thought we'd go to Diagon Alley. We can get you a wand and maybe an owl, if you'd like one."

"Would I!" I loved petting the mail owls when they came; Dad must have noticed. I was thrilled at the thought of getting my own owl.

We went by Floo Powder. I must say, I prefer broom travel. Diagon Alley was so strange to me. I stared at everything around me. Witches and wizards haggling and talking filled the streets and shops. Strange odors wafted down the street. Cats, rats and the odd toad avoided peoples' feet as best they could. Dad took me to Ollivanders' first.

"Best wand makers in the world, and we Blacks never take second best!" he said. Mr. Ollivander was very peculiar, although I wasn't sure if perhaps I hadn't met enough wizards to make such a judgment.

"Patrick Black, how nice to see you. Let's see, maple and dragon heartstring, 12 inches, right?" Dad nodded. "And this must be your daughter. She has your eyes, I see. Let's try you with the basic, willow and unicorn hair." He handed me a wand. I waved it, but nothing happened. "Oak and phoenix feather," Mr. Ollivander said. I tried it, and still nothing happened. We tried ash and unicorn hair, birch and dragon heartstring, and maple and phoenix feather. Still nothing happened. I started to get worried; what if I wasn't really a witch? Was that why I couldn't use the wands? Now Mr. Ollivander handed me a rowan and phoenix feather wand, ten inches. I waved it. Sparks shot out from one end and singed my father's beard. He laughed, and I grinned in relief. We paid Mr. Ollivander for it, and set off up the street looking for an owl shop.

When we found one, I was startled at all the different kinds. I got a medium-sized owl that was brown all over. We carried her out of the store in the cage.

We had lunch in the Leaky Cauldron. Almost everyone there seemed to know Dad, and he took great pride in introducing me. We ate lunch and then returned to our home by Floo Powder. Dad asked me, as we fed my new owl, what I thought of Diagon Alley.

"It's great!" I said. "Will we go there again?"

"Yes, we'll have to get the rest of your school things," he said. He showed me a few simple spells to try out, and then after the rain stopped, we went outside and played broom tag.

The next morning when I came down for breakfast, the kitchen was empty. There was a note from my father on the table

Lisa- I have some important business to do today. Why don't you visit the village? There's a wizarding family there that you can introduce yourself to if you want. They live at 16 Forsythia Lane. I put down the note and fixed myself breakfast. Then, after cleaning up, I went out and started down the road.

The village was about two miles away, along a nice little road. I

walked along, breathing in the sunshine. The village, I saw as I rounded the last bend, wasn't large - three shops and twenty or so houses. It didn't take long to find 16 Forsythia Lane. It was a nice house, though a lot smaller than mine. I walked up and knocked on the door. A pretty woman answered it. She was about my mother's age, but much nicer looking, I thought. She had red hair and brown eyes, like me.

"Hello?" she said politely.

"Hi. I'm Lisa Black, and my father said I should introduce myself."

"Oh, you're Patrick's daughter?"

"Yes, I am."

"Come in. I'm Ellen Potter. Jason! Jason!"

"I'm coming Mother." A boy about my age came downstairs. He had black hair and eyes and was carrying a broom. "I was just about to - oh, a visitor."

"This is Lisa Black."

"Uncle Patrick's daughter?"

"Yes."

"Are we related?" I asked curiously. Mrs. Potter laughed. "No, he just calls your father that. My husband and your father were best friends until he died." A shiver of sorrow crossed her face. "You must call me Aunt Ellie."

"All right," I said.

"I'm glad you visited, dear. Patrick said he'd managed to get you away from your mother. It's about time he did, too. You'll be going to Hogwarts in the fall, I imagine."

"Yes, I will."

"Jason here will be starting too." Mrs. Potter - Aunt Ellie - led the way into the parlor. Jason turned to me as I sat down.

"Play any Quidditch?"

"Not yet, but I want to."

"Jason, remember she's lived with Muggles most of her life," his mother admonished.

"That would be so weird! Did you even know that you were a witch?" Jason looked as if he could hardly believe it could be possible not to know you were a witch.

"No. My mother didn't even tell me that I had a different father than my half-sisters. She made me find that out myself." Aunt Ellie clucked her tongue.

"Such a shame, that. Ah well, you're here now dear." Jason and I were soon having an animated conversation.

"Your dad sometimes lets me use that meadow behind your house to practice flying."

"Well, I hope you come sometime when I'm using it," I said.

"I will."

"Why don't the two of you go now?" Aunt Ellie smiled at us. "I've got some shopping to do, Jason, and unless you want to come alongâ€¦" He groaned, and we agreed to go flying, so Aunt Ellie made us a picnic lunch and we set off.

Dad got back late that evening. He was exhausted and his robes were sopping. He sat at the table and drank tea while I told him about my day.

"I'm glad you made friends with the Potters. They're quite a nice family. Our families have been friends forever, you know." He looked at me. "I usually have them over for tea and dinner on Saturdays. Would you mind if we did that?"

"Of course not. Jason said that he'd teach me some more Quidditch moves next time we got together. If it rains, I'll get him to play wizard chess."

"Yes, you sure took to that quickly."

"Dad, where did you have to go?"

"Oh, I just had a job for the Ministry." But his air of nonchalance didn't fool me.

"Can't you tell me?"

"Sorry Lisa, but I can't." He looked a bit upset, so I changed the subject.

Saturday rolled around soon enough, and I waited eagerly for the Potters to arrive. When they did, it had begun to rain, so Jason and I played wizard chess in the library. Then he taught me to play gobstones and exploding snap.

By teatime the rain had become a downpour, and by dinner it was a full thunderstorm. Lightning and thunder were everywhere, the wind was shrieking around the windows, and there was hail. Dad looked out in it.

"You can't go home," he said to Aunt Ellie. "You can spend the night here."

"What about Floo Powder?" she asked.

"You didn't leave your fire on, did you?" She shook her head. "A cold landing's no good, not in this weather. No, just come on into the library."

We had a huge roaring fire. Dad and Aunt Ellie sat in stuffed chairs

and talked while Jason and I played endless games of chess. Then the lights went out. Dad laughed and waved his wands. Oil lamps all around the room came on, lighting the place with a gentle glow.

Around eleven, Dad said that Jason and I had to go to bed. We protested, but he insisted, so off we marched. I took him to a guest room. Before turning in, he turned to me and said,

"This evening's been the most fun I've had in a long time. Thanks."

"Thank you," I said. "I've never known any wizard kids before, and you've been a great friend."

"We can still be friends at Hogwarts."

"What if we're in different Houses?"

"Come on! When was the last time a Potter or Black wasn't in Gryffindor?" He rolled his eyes, as if the idea was too fantastic to believe.

"I don't know." Of course, I didn't know that much about my family, or his, really.

"Neither do I, so don't worry."

The next morning, it was still raining. Finally, after lunch, it stopped on and I were in the library playing when an owl fluttered in, dropped a paper, and left.

"Hey, the Daily Prophet! There's a series in there that I want to read!" Jason said. I looked at the front page.

"Mysterious Attacks Continue," I read from the headline. "Death Count Now Twelve." I looked at Jason. "What's this about?"

"I don't know. I hadn't heard anything about this. But I haven't looked at the papers in a few days," he said, frowning. "What else does it say?" I picked up the paper and brought it over.

The attacks have not yet stopped, and the Ministry says it is no closer to finding the perpetrators. Rumors that the V. League is involved have not been substantiated. Eridius Malfoy is calling on the Minister of Magic to do something about the attacks, but Minister Wood says that there's really nothing he can do right now.

"What's the 'V League'?" I asked.

"It must be one of those freak groups that pop up every now and then. They say that they want to bring back Voldemort somehow. The papers still don't print his name, you know. People are still scared of him."

"So they've killed twelve people?"

"That's what it sounds like. Must be a very bad group. Most of them are just talk." Just then, my father came in. He looked at the newspaper that we were reading. His face hardened.

"So it's gotten worse. I was afraid of this."

"What is it, Patrick?" Jason's mother had come in. Dad handed her the paper. Her face went pale. "Those awful people," she said in a whisper. Suddenly, a barn owl flew in through the open window and dropped a letter on Dad's feet. He picked it up, glanced at it, ripped it open, and read the contents. His face went a little pale.

"I have to go up to London immediately, and I won't be back for at least a week," he said.

"Lisa can stay with us," Aunt Ellie said immediately.

"Thank you, Ellen. I really appreciate that."

"Well, you have to go now," she said. "I'll take care of Lisa." Dad nodded, pulled out his wand, and Disapparated.

"All right, dear, get some clothes and we'll go to my house," said Aunt Ellie kindly. "Don't you worry about your father. He's been in much tighter situations and come out fine," she said with a smile. But her eyes looked sad, and I wondered why.

Dad was gone ten days. I got a letter from him on the third that said that he loved me and that there was nothing for me to worry about. On the ninth day, my mother appeared in the village.

I don't know how she found out where I was, but she had her husband with her, and seemed quite ready to pitch a huge fit. The first I knew about it, she was knocking on the Potters' door. Aunt Ellie opened it.

"Hello?" she said.

"I've been told that my daughter is here," mother said.

"Who is your daughter?"

"Lisa." Of course, Aunt Ellie knew who she meant, but I think she was trying to stall for time. I saw my mother walk in. "Lisa!" she called. I was worried. I thought briefly of slipping out the back, but that was no good. Anyway, Aunt Ellie wouldn't let her take me. So I went downstairs. Mother was sitting in the living room, lips pursed, eyes looking at the wizarding stuff disapprovingly.

"There you are," she said. "Lisa, I'm not mad at you for running away. I know that he probably put some sort of spell on you. After all, you're a good girl, and wouldn't want to get your mother angry, would you?"

"Mother, you're treating me as if I were three! Dad didn't put a spell on me. Why didn't you ever tell me he was a wizard, hmm? Were you afraid I'd want to do magic too? Well, I do. And I'm going to Hogwarts in the fall, and I'm going to be a witch." I crossed my arms and sat firmly.

"I'll have him arrested for kidnapping you!"

"Good luck." I looked at her. "Like they could arrest him if he didn't want to be. No, mother, I've made my decision, and I'm going to stay right here." Now my stepfather spoke up.

"Lisa, we just want what's best for you."

"Then let me stay with Dad! I'm happy here, and I'm going to do something I want to do! If I go back with you, then what? I grow up to be an accountant?"

"That's a perfectly good job." He flushed, for that's what he did.

"A perfectly boring job. Anyway, you can't take me. I've read up on wizard law, and it says that if a wizard-Muggle pair splits up, custody of the children automatically goes to the wizard as long as there are no other circumstances. He should have you arrested for kidnapping, not the other way around."

"And where is your precious father now, hmm? The villagers say he's been gone over a week." Now Aunt Ellie spoke up.

"You know, Grace, I don't know what Patrick ever saw in you. You haven't improved a whit in the years you've been gone. Patrick should have left you, not the other way around."

"Oh, I know perfectly well why he married me." Mother looked at Aunt Ellie, who, for some reason, went pink and fell silent.

"Why do you hate wizards so much?" I asked her. I simply could not understand it.

"Because I know what they're like!" Her voice was full of passion. "Nasty and spiteful, all of them! I know you're not like that â€" she wasn't, you know." I didn't know what she was talking about; she seemed to be speaking to my stepfather. Was she so upset that her words weren't making sense? Perhaps she meant that I wasn't a nasty person before but that they'd make me that way. Her next words seemed to confirm that. "It'll ruin you. You might have good intentions but it's no good. It'll ruin you."

"No, it won't, mother." I stared at her. "I like being a wizard. And Dad and Aunt Ellie and the others I've met â€" they're not spiteful or wicked. They're just people."

After that, the conversation went downhill. Mother finally left, but she said she'd be back tomorrow. I didn't sleep much that night.

The next day I went down to breakfast.

"Dad!" He was sitting at the table, eating toast and reading the newspaper. He looked at me and grinned. "Dad, I'm so glad you're back! I've been really worried about you."

"I'm fine, Lisa. But Ellie tells me there's been some trouble?"

"Oh, yeah. Mom showed up and won't go away. She'll be here soon." I grimaced. Dad started to say something, but the doorbell rang. Of

course it was Mother. She walked in and glared at my father.

"Grace," he said evenly.

"How dare you?" she spat. "You know what I think of you and your kind. And then to come and kidnap my daughter--"

"Lisa is my daughter too."

"I didn't want her raised to be one of you! That's why I left!"

"No, Grace, you left because you couldn't stand to face the truth. Lisa's entitled to make some decisions about her own future, and she's made them." I moved over to behind Dad's chair and stared defiantly at my mother.

"I already told you my answer, mother. It hasn't changed." She argued with us for hours, but finally left. We left then too and went home. Over dinner I asked,

"Why didn't you just make her go away?"

"Lisa, we have the power to that, but not the right. She's a person, too, you know, not a puppet to dance to our strings. Remember that, Lisa."

Mother left that afternoon and went back to the USA. The rest of the summer passed quickly. Almost before I realized it, it was September 1.

The Potters traveled to King's Cross with us. It was quite far away; we had to get up very early to get there on time, but we got to the platform in plenty of time. Dad looked at me.

"I'll miss you," he said.

"I'll miss you too, but I'll write lots," I said. "And it'll be Christmas before we know it."

"Right. Send me an owl tomorrow and let me know about your first day," he said. "And have a nice time." Then Jason and I got on the train together. The train set off down the track, and I looked back nervously. It seemed as if I were about to really begin a whole new life. I couldn't wait to get started.

The door slid open and two boys came in. One had red hair; the other had brown. The redhead, who was also taller, said,

"Is there room here?" We nodded. The boys sat down. "I'm Andy Weasley, by the way." We introduced ourselves. The other boy spoke up.

"I'm Philip Lupin," he said. We struck up a lively conversation. Andy and Phil already knew each other, but it was their first year too. Andy was the oldest of six; four boys and two girls.

"Being the oldest isn't always fun," he said. "You have to set an example for your younger siblings, and then any time they do anything

earlier than you do, you never hear the end of it! Plus, whenever Mom and Dad have things to do, guess who gets stuck watching the other guys? And the diapers! My youngest sister and brother are both still in diapers, we have to change about twenty every day. I'm really glad to be going to Hogwarts." I asked Phil about his family.

"No siblings, just my parents," he said. "They were both in Gryffindor. I do hope I'm in it too." We all seconded that.

At lunch we bought a lot of candy from off the cart. Andy had a collection of famous witch and wizard cards, so he pulled it out to show us.

"I've even got Harry Potter, and those are really rare! Plus, I have some of my relatives, see, here's Ron Weasley, and this is Percy. Oh, look, here's Remus Lupin! I'd do a lot for a Sirius Black, but I can't seem to find any." We stared at the famous people and talked about them for a while. It was a pleasant way to travel.

The Great Hall was full of people. I stared up at the ceiling. I'd heard that it was enchanted to look like the sky outside, but tonight was cloudy and I couldn't see much of anything. I stood, waiting for my name to be called and hoping it wouldn't be long. Of course, with a last name of Black, it wasn't. In fact, I was the first student to be sorted. I sat on the stool, the hat over my eyes, and waited.

"Let's see, I want to start this year off right. Must be careful with this first selection. Interesting head you've got here. Pride and excitement, a little doubt, don't worry, you'll be fine. You're eager and talented, that's good. Loyal to your friends, I see, that's always nice to see. Determined to live up to your heritage - well, all right, I'll let you be GRYFFINDOR!" I took off the hat and walked to the cheering table. There were quite a few empty chairs. I sat down by two other empty places. I hoped that perhaps Jason would be able to sit in one of them.

I watched a lot of students who I didn't know get sorted, and then it was Phil's turn. The hat made him a Gryffindor too. He took one of the chairs by me. Now there were only six students before Jason. Three were made Hufflepuffs, one Ravenclaw, and two Slytherins. Then Jason took the hat. I crossed my fingers tightly. The hat took a minute to decide, then yelled 'Gryffindor!' to the whole hall. I grinned with relief as he collapsed into the chair next to me.

Andy got in Gryffindor too. He was the last student to be sorted. The Headmistress, whose name was Emily McGonagall, stood up and greeted us all. Then we attacked the piles of food that had magically appeared.

Hogwarts was wonderful. There was so much to do and learn that the days just seemed to fly past. Jason, Andy, Phil and I stuck together mostly. Of course we all had the same classes, so we usually sat together near the front. Except in Transfigurations.

Professor Miranda Snape hated us. I didn't know why, except that she hated me most of all. Any time there was some particularly hard thing to do, she'd call me up to the front of the class and make me try to do it while she stood by and sneered at my efforts. Then she'd take points from Gryffindor when I failed. By the third week at Hogwarts,

I was completely fed up with the whole business.

"I can't stand Transfigurations!" I said as I slammed my books down on the table in the common room. "Snape just hates me, and I don't know why."

"Eh, the whole Snape family is that way to everyone in Gryffindor, my dad says," said Andy.

"Yes, but she really hates me! I don't know what I'm going to do next time she calls on me. She doesn't even give us time to practice what we're supposed to have learned before she makes us try it!" Jason was staring into space.

"We've got the book right here," he said. "There's no reason why you couldn't study up ahead of time. In fact, we'll all study two lessons ahead. That way we'll be able to do anything she tells us too!"

It was hard, trying to study without a teacher, but well worth it. The next time she called me to turn a coin into a mirror, I performed the spell perfectly. The expression on Snape's face was priceless.

Unfortunately, Snape was not the only problem we had. One of the others was Malfoy.

Ari Malfoy was Eridius Malfoy's son, and Eridius was a very wealthy, very influential, very nasty man. I'd heard Dad talking about him, and he never had anything complementary to say about him. Ari lived up to his father's reputation, and more.

We were with the Slytherins in Potions. Ari and his gang of supporters always worked not far from us. We'd often hear them sneering about 'that bunch of Gryffindor losers'.

"Oh, yes, they all have good wizarding family names," I heard Ari say one day, "But scratch below the surface, and you'll see Muggle blood. Black was raised as a Muggle, I hear, and Potter's mother was a Mudblood. Not one of them has pure wizarding blood. Not like my family. We haven't even had a half-blood in our line for five hundred years!" He laughed maliciously.

We ignored him, of course, for we knew it didn't matter a bit. A week later, though, we couldn't ignore him.

"Heard about your father, Black," he sneered, eyes glinting with cold delight. "So sorry what happened to him."

"What?" I said.

"Didn't he tell you? It's been all over the Daily Prophet. Look." He pulled an article out of his pocket and handed it to me.

Five Muggles Killed, One Wizard Injured, in Latest V. League Attacks, the headline read. I stared as I read further. V. League operators injured Mr. Patrick Black Friday as he attempted to defend a train full of Muggles that they were attacking. "No question, Black's efforts saved many of these Muggles," Minister Wood said today. "We are very sorry that he was injured, and hope that he makes a quick and complete recovery." We cannot ascertain how badly he was

injured, but have been informed that he is in no danger. However, concern about the V. League is mounting in the face of their continued attacks. "We may be facing a serious crisis here," said a Ministry worker who wishes to remain anonymous. "This group is far more dangerous and unpredictable than any of the groups that have cropped up in the hundred and fifty years since the defeat of You-Know-Who."_ I looked at Malfoy's face, which was still wearing a sneering smile.

"So sorry about your father," he said again. "I do hope he recovers. The V. League can do very nasty things, I've heard. Sometimes nobody even knows until it's too late."

I punched him right in that sneering face of his. The smirk disappeared as a look of horror passed over it. Parkinson and Zabini, his goons, came after me, but Andy and Phil took them on. Jason was trying to pull me off of Malfoy, for I had thrown myself at him and was trying to beat his face in.

"You are a stupid, idiotic, useless, GIT!!!" I yelled. Malfoy couldn't seem to use his hands well, although he did manage to kick me. I was so upset that I hardly noticed. The classroom was in an uproar. Half the students were cheering; the other half was standing on the desks, trying to keep out of the way.

"STOP THIS!" yelled Professor Longbottom. His wand, raised high into the air, shot off sparks and made loud bangs. "Stop this now!" Jason managed to pull me off Malfoy. I felt my nose, which was bleeding. I hadn't even felt it get hit. Andy and Phil straightened their robes sheepishly. "Never in all the time I have been a professor," Longbottom began. He stopped. "Who started this?"

The Slytherins pointed to me. The Gryffindors pointed to Malfoy. "Hmm," said Longbottom. "Malfoy, what's your story?"

"She just attacked me!" he said. "Look at me!" He did look a mess. I rather thought that his left eye would be swollen shut in a few minutes. I almost grinned at that thought, but Longbottom was turning to me.

"It wasn't her fault, Professor," Jason began. "She'd just heard about her father, and then Malfoy was taunting her."

"What about your father?" asked Longbottom. I handed him the article, which was now quite crumpled. "I see," he said after reading it. "Malfoy, you knew this?" Malfoy nodded. "Well, good grief! You must be very stupid to pick a fight with someone who just got news like this!" He turned to me. "Fighting is against our rules, and there are really no excuses, but - Do you know how he is?" he asked anxiously. I shook my head no. "Well, go up to the Infirmary and get that taken care of. Then send him an owl and find out, girl! We can't have you going around hitting people because you're worried about him, can we?" I smiled and hurried out.

"That was incredible!" said Andy at dinner. "Malfoy looks awful, and even the Slytherins are teasing him about being beaten up by a girl! And Zabini will think twice before trying to bother me again!"

"I'm just glad I didn't get in trouble," I said. "That was incredibly stupid."

"Did you get your answer?" Jason asked.

"No, but - hey, wait a minute, I think that's Alacrity!"

"Is that what you named your owl?" Phil asked. "I never did know."

"Yes, I thought that would be a good name for her." Alacrity dropped a letter on my plate, fluttered twice around my head, and swooped off. I opened the letter quickly.

"It's from your mum, Jason!"

Lisa,

I know you must be worried about your father. I'm sorry that I forgot to write to you as soon as we found out what happened, but it's been very hectic. First of all, your father will make a complete recovery, don't worry about that. He wasn't very badly injured, and a few days in bed will fix him. I'm here taking care of him, and he'll be fine.

He was aboard a Muggle train when the V League attacked. His courage saved the lives of most of the people on the train, although a few died. They're talking of giving him the Order of Merlin for what he did. Don't worry about the V League either; the Ministry thinks it has a good lead on them and they should be gone soon.

Tell my son he'd better be good, and your father sends his love.

Ellen Potter.

"I'm so relieved," I said after reading the letter. "Your mum will take care of him, Jason."

"What does she mean, be good?" Jason asked. "I'm always good."

"That's not what Malfoy thinks," Andy grinned.

"Who cares what Malfoy thinks, the little git," said Jason. We all agreed.

Soon it was Christmas time, and we got on the train to go home. Phil and Andy were staying on, so Jason and I sat by ourselves on the long ride back.

I saw Dad as soon as I got off the train. He looked well, although he was a bit paler and had lost weight.

"Dad!" I yelled, and hugged him.

"Lisa, it's so good to see you! It's been too long." I pulled out of his arms and looked at him.

"Are you okay, Dad?"

"Yes, Lisa. Ellie has been taking good care of me. I'm fine, just a

little tired still." I hugged him again.

"I've got so much to tell you! I've learned so much already, and I've met so many people."

"You can tell us about it on the way home. I was very proud when I heard you were in Gryffindor, dear."

"He was, Lisa," Aunt Ellie said. "I was there when we both got the letters. I'm proud of you both." She smiled.

We rode home, talking all the way. It was very late by the time we dropped the Potters off at their house and got to ours. I went straight to bed, too tired to talk.

The next day, after breakfast, Dad and I started to decorate. We got a huge tree and put it in the library. It was at least twenty feet high. Dad performed a charm to get little lights to sit on the branches, like stars. I thought it was a whole lot faster and simpler than the Muggle way. After lunch, the Potters came over and helped decorate. Dad had already invited them to spend Christmas with us.

"The more, the merrier," he said. Aunt Ellie agreed. She asked me to come over later that week and help her plan the Christmas dinner.

"We'll go and get holly and ivy that day, Jason," my father said. Everyone thought that the plan was a good one.

Tuesday morning, bright and early, I headed over to the Potters' house. Aunt Ellie let me in. We had a cup of tea and then started to plan the meal.

"Jason tells me you're having a nice time," she said.

"Yes, I like all my teachers - except Professor Snape."

"Miranda?"

"You know her?" I was surprised. Somehow it was hard to think of anyone as nice as Aunt Ellie knowing someone as nasty as Snape.

"I was the same year that she was. I remember her very well."

"Do you know why she hates me?"

"Maybe," she said slowly. "I don't really know if I should be telling you this, but I don't even know if anyone else knows. Oh, well, I suppose you should know. No doubt someone would tell you anyway - there are enough people who know!"

"Your father, Patrick, and my husband, Will, were best friends at Hogwarts. Will was very handsome - so was your father - and very talented, both of them. They got into mischief, of course, and made lots of friends and enemies."

"Miranda was attracted to your father, but he didn't care about her. Oh, she was pretty enough, and clever, but he didn't care for her."

"Why not?"

"I didn't really know then, but - well, he had a crush on me. But of course, I was in love with Will, and he with me. I don't know what it must have been like for your father, but he never said a word. He was still the best friend either of us had, and he was best man at our wedding. Then when Will was killed, he was here for me. He's been a surrogate father for Jason. I think that it might have had something to do with the fact that he couldn't locate you.

"He married your mother about four weeks after he met her. She was pretty - even beautiful - and she wasn't a witch. At that point in his life, I think that might have attracted him. But then she left and took you, and it really hurt him for a few years. He's over it now, but he's been through a lot.

"But anyway, Miranda resents you because she once loved and now hates your father. She also didn't think much of me, or Will, so Jason probably isn't her favorite student either."

"You could say that."

"Lisa, I told you these things because you should know them. But I wouldn't ask your father about them if you don't have to. He's got enough on his mind, what with the V League, as it is."

"All right. Are they very bad?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so. And the Ministry's raid only got a few of them - nobody important. They're all in Azkaban, but..." I shivered at the mention of Azkaban. One of the books I'd read had been by Sirius Black, who was of course one of my ancestors. It wasn't actually a book; just a handwritten memoir. It had some chilling passages describing Azkaban. I could remember them still, even though I hadn't read the book in months.

On Christmas, I woke up to find the ground covered in about three inches of new snow. It was lovely. I ran to the kitchen, where Dad and I ate pancakes and sausages and had hot cocoa. We were just washing up when the Potters arrived.

"Happy Christmas!" we all said. There were a few moments' of confused chatter. Then we trooped to the library to open gifts.

I'd seen the library just yesterday, but somehow, even though everything was the same, a magical transformation seemed to have taken place. The tree was decked out in all its' splendor, the fireplace was ablaze with heat, the windows were frosted silver. There were presents sitting in piles near the tree, waiting to be opened. Soon, I knew, the aroma of roasting turkey would drift down the hall from where Aunt Ellie and I had set everything up last night. _Magic is so convenient, _I reflected. A Muggle might have to actually cook Christmas dinner, but not a wizarding family.

I'd ordered a scarf for Dad that got thicker as the temperature dropped, and lighter as it rose. He seemed to like it, which pleased me. Dad gave me a set of Gobstones, a pair of shoes that would keep your feet from getting tired, and a red scarf to wear to Gryffindor Quidditch matches. I had just unwrapped a box of Chocolate Frogs when

Aunt Ellie gave Jason a package.

"Your father would have wanted you to have this," she said, and there was a glint in her eyes that looked like tears. Clearly puzzled, Jason unwrapped it. Out fell a silvery cloak and a very old piece of parchment.

"An Invisibility Cloak?" he breathed. "Wow! And what's this?" My dad grinned.

"When you're at Hogwarts, tap it with your wand and say 'I solemnly swear that I am up to no good.' It's a map, with every corridor and secret passage at Hogwarts. And it has a few other features too, that may come in handy if you are anything like your dad was."

"Just, do try not to get into trouble, dear," Aunt Ellie said. "Those have been in the family for years. Probably every Potter to go to Hogwarts has used that cloak. I could tell you some stories about your father, but I won't, because it might give you ideas."

After we were done eating, we went outside and had a snowball fight. We only went in after it was too dark to see. _This was my best Christmas ever,_ I thought that night as I drifted off to sleep.

Five days later, we were back on the Hogwarts Express. Jason had his cloak hidden in his bag somewhere, I knew.

"Great holiday," he said to me.

"Best I've ever had. Your mum is so neat."

"Your dad is great too."

"Yeah, well, you know my mum. I wish she was like yours."

"I wish I had a dad."

"You know, wouldn't it be great if--"

"If what?"

"Oh, just a crazy idea."

"Same idea that I have?"

"What's that?"

"That you want my mum, and I want your dad, and the only way to get that..."

"Is if they were to get married."

"Right."

"But how do we just get them to fall in love?"

"We've got until June to come up with a plan. We'll make it good."

And with that, we began to discuss various schemes.

Well, the time flew by, and pretty soon it was Easter. Nobody ever goes home over Easter break; there's too much studying to do. And Quidditch finals would be soon- Gryffindor and Hufflepuff were contending for the Quidditch Cup. I was very busy now, trying to study everything. I was pretty good at everything, but I was especially afraid that Snape would fail me on purpose. Malfoy mostly avoided the four of us, as he was still being taunted for letting me beat him up. The only thing I was worried about now was the V League. Dad said they'd gone quiet, but most people were very worried about whether they'd come back. I felt like I was pretty safe at Hogwarts, but I did worry about my father. They'd already injured him once, and I didn't want him killed. I couldn't bear it if that happened.

I'd known my father for less than a year, but I felt very close to him. I loved him a lot too. I hardly ever thought about my mother and half-sisters nowadays. Well, sometimes I missed Emily and Ruth, but my mother had not been exactly friendly the last time we met.

Anyway, time flew by like the golden snitch, and soon it was near my birthday. I didn't even have time to care, as we had so much studying to do for the exams.

"I just don't understand about Switching Spells," Phil moaned.

"That's easy, what about these wizards who we have to memorize in order and what they did?" Andy demanded, holding up the list from History of Magic. "Binns is always going on about how he taught some of the people on this list - bet he bored them to sleep too."

"Yeah, well, it must have been more interesting when some of those guys were at school," Phil retorted. "I mean the most exciting thing that's happened all year was Lisa here pounding Malfoy. Dad always told me stories about our family - about Remus, my great-great-however-many-great-grandfather, and his adventures here. I always thought it would be a lot more fun than it is."

"I don't see how they weren't caught," Andy said. "I mean, was it easier to sneak around at night?"

"They had an Invisibility Cloak," Jason said.

"Oh, well, that explains it. Too bad we don't have it. I can think of some fun we'd have."

"We do - well, I do," he said. "Mum gave it to me for Christmas." He ran off to his room, and back down again. "Actually, I'm about ready to give these things a try," he said, brandishing the Cloak and the map.

"Tonight?" asked Andy, a gleam in his eye.

"Well, we won't all fit," Jason said. "I don't think more than three of us can go."

"The three of us will draw straws," Phil said. "Obviously you have to

go, it's your cloak."

"All right, I'll hold the straws," Jason said. So we all grabbed them, and Phil got the short one.

"Well, I'll go next time," he said, hiding his disappointment well.

"Ouch! That was my foot!"

"Sorry, I didn't see it."

"Of course you didn't see it, this is an Invisibility Cloak!"

"Shh! You're going to get us caught!"

We were headed for the room where the Slytherin Quidditch team kept its robes. Twenty minutes later, we were back in bed.

"Can't wait for the match tomorrow," Andy grinned as we got out of the Cloak.

"Yeah! Should be hilarious." Slytherin was playing Ravenclaw. Two weeks from now was the Hufflepuff/Gryffindor game.

"This should be the match of the season," I said with a huge smile.

"And they're off! The teams rise into the air as one! Harris of Ravenclaw has the Quaffle, he's swooping toward the goal- here comes a Bludger - no! Beater Jones has hit it back! Amelia is the first girl in centuries to be a Beater on a Hogwarts team. She's superb - I shouldn't wonder if she doesn't go professional in two years when she graduated. Snell, the Slytherin Seeker, ducks that Bludger - what the-?"

All over the stadium, people were pointing to the Slytherins. The back of their robes began to flash different colors. Suddenly, they showed definite patterns.

No Slytherin is worth his salt, said one. _Couldn't catch the Snitch if I ate it_, said Snell's robes. _I'm bad! I'm rude!_ was on the back of the Slytherin Captain. People from the other Houses began to howl with laughter. The Slytherins were frantically trying to make their robes stop insulting them. Meanwhile, the Ravenclaws scored six times. Finally the Slytherins gave up and went back to the game. Just as the game ended in a Ravenclaw victory, a final message shot across Snell's back. _Moony, Padfoot and Prongs are proud of you_, it read.

Back in the common room, we tried to talk over the giggles and 'You should have seen his face!' comments.

"Which of you did that last one?" Phil was asking.

"None of us, that's what I'm trying to tell you," Jason said. "I don't know how that got there!"

"Well, you've got to admit that you guys are a bit like them," I said.

"Oh, yeah? Then who are you, Lily?" Phil laughed.

"Maybe," I said slowly.

"What do you mean?" Andy asked.

"I really don't know," I said. "I'm tired, I'm going to bed."

That night I had a strange dream. I was standing in a dark clearing. The moon was half-full, and starlight streamed in, but it was very dark. There was a girl, sitting on a rock in the middle of it, staring at me. She had red hair and green eyes. She looked as though she were no more than eighteen.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Lily," she said simply. I looked at her.

"Lily Potter? But you've been dead over a hundred years!"

"So has Professor Binns," she said calmly.

"But you aren't a ghost!"

"No, I'm something different. I'm a wraith or a spirit, I really don't know. I cannot go yet; my task is not finished."

"Your task?"

"I cannot leave until the one who killed me is dead."

"You mean Voldemort?"

"Yes."

"But he died years ago!"

"No, he did not," she said simply. "That's why I'm still here. I've been waiting all this time."

"For what?"

"For you."

"Me?"

"Yes. Oh, I didn't know that it would be you in particular, but I knew that someday, when Voldemort was preparing to return, a girl would come who would be enough like me that I could speak to her in this manner. You and I have a lot in common, Lisa; we grew up not knowing about our talents, we have similar friends, we would risk our lives for the people we care enough about. Lisa, I can't do much. You'll have to do a lot, but I'll be hear to help."

"Now?" I asked.

"No. There is time yet. Go; wake up and tell your friends about this dream."

I sat up in bed. Light was streaming in through the window. I went down to breakfast hardly believing that my dream could be anything but random neurons firing in my brain.

"Man, I had a weird dream last night," Andy was saying. The other three of us stared at him intently. I noticed that Jason and Phil were just as eager as I was.

"Go on," Jason encouraged.

"Well, this guy was in it, and he said he was Sirius Black! He said he was still hanging around-

"Because Voldemort hadn't been killed yet," Phil continued.

"And he needed you to help him," Jason finished grimly.

"You had the same dream?"

"Except I saw James Potter," Jason said.

"I saw Remus," said Phil.

"Lily was in my dream," I whispered. "They must have been real."

"What are we going to do?" Phil asked.

"She said we had time yet," I replied. "I don't think we do anything just yet. I think that we wait and see."

I don't know how I got through finals, but I passed them all and was soon on my way home. None of us had had another of the dreams, but we wondered whether to tell anyone. Finally, we decided not to, but we were all quite uneasy. I wondered just what kind of summer was ahead of us.

2. Changes

> <meta name="ProgId"> Chapter 5

The first week of summer break was pretty relaxing. Dad and I did a lot of talking. He had recovered completely from the attack of the V League months before. By my eighth day back, I was ready to put into action my part of the plan that Jason and I had cooked up to get our parents to fall in love with each other.

"Dad," I said that evening, "Why did you marry mum anyway?" He looked at me for a minute, surprised.

"Why on earth are you wondering that?"

"I know that most wizards don't marry Muggles, not anymore. So why did you?"

"Well, I was in love with her," he said. "I thought I was, anyway."

"But she didn't love you, or she wouldn't have left, right?"

"I don't know, Lisa. I was a bit confused at the time, and I made some choices that I regret now."

"I see." I sighed and looked out the window at the rain.

"Why?" he asked.

"I was just wishing I had a mum to talk to sometimes. Somehow I don't think mother would be too thrilled if I wrote to her asking for advice about dealing with wizards."

"You could ask me."

"It's just - there's some things that a girl should have a mother to talk to about."

"Ellie would be glad to help you with anything, I'm sure."

"Yes, but she isn't really..." I trailed off, unsure what to say. "Hey, can we have them over for dinner tomorrow?" I asked, changing the subject.

"Sure," Dad said. "I've been thinking that it's about time."

The next evening, Jason and I went straight to my room to talk.

"Any headway?" he asked me.

"Not really. I think that I maybe put the idea into his brain, though."

"Good, keep working. I talked to Mum about Dad - and, you know, she didn't cry once! That's the first time since -since..."

"Jason, I don't mean to hurt you, and you don't have to answer, but, how did your father die?"

"Well," he began. "It was years ago. I was very young - I don't remember much about dad. Mum tells me that he worked for the Ministry, and that he was doing something for them when he was killed. I don't know what. It was top secret; Mum doesn't even know what it was." His face was pained. I changed the subject.

"Hey, I found out some information."

"About what?"

"Remember those dreams we had? Well, I did some research to find out about them, and sure enough, I found information. It's pretty old, but it seems clear." I stopped, waiting to gauge his reaction.

"First of all, spirits like them are called Manes."

"Manes? What's that?"

"An ancient term. Anyway, they are a bit like ghosts, in that they are the spirits of people who have died. Unlike ghosts, though, Manes

can be seen by only one person; someone who is enough like that person that -well, it's not too clear, but the book speaks of 'resonation of mind and spirit' and 'kindred sundered by time'. It's all like that, hundreds of pages. Anyway, these spirits can't even talk to other Manes, but they usually know a lot. And Manes are good; they have bound themselves to this world in order to stop an evil or right a wrong. It's not known what they go through, but it is reputed to be - unpleasant." I laughed, feeling a bit nervous. "I sound like Professor Binns or someone."

"Is there a chance that these could be evil spirits masquerading as James and Lily and the others?"

"Perhaps, but I don't think so. I have more research to do, but I think that the Manes are who they say they are."

"Well, I'll take that like you say it. I'll write to Andy and Phil tomorrow and let them know what you found out."

"I'm also researching about Lily Potter."

"What have you found?"

"Not much. There are the standard facts; that she was a Muggle-born, married James, had one son, Harry, died in 1981, a brief description, a few pictures, that she was Head Girl at Hogwarts, and some obituaries. There really isn't much else; a little about her Muggle family, but that's more because they had the raising of Harry than anything else."

"That's very odd."

"It makes me think that there's more to her story than we know."

"After a hundred and fifty years are we likely to find it out?"

"I don't know."

"Jason! Lisa! Time for dinner!"

"We're on our way!"

We had a nice dinner, afterwards going to the library to play. At about eight, Jason and I excused ourselves, saying that we wanted to work on an assignment together.

"This really isn't working as well as I'd hoped," he said.

"Well, it may be too soon to tell. We'll keep at it. After all, this is the best plan we came up with."

"Yeah, Andy's really stunk. Any time people try to use love potions, there are unexpected results, everyone knows that."

That night I dreamed again of Lily. Her face was in shadow, and she spoke in barely more than a whisper.

"Voldemort is coming. Beware, and be careful. Enemies can be anywhere. Trust your friends, but be careful with who else you

trust."

"Is it really that bad already?"

"Plans have been set in motion that will mature in later months or years. Evil plans, that I do not know. But I will help you."

"Can you see the others like you? Your husband and Sirius and Remus?"

"Are they like this too? I did not know. I cannot see them; I can barely see the physical world, except through you."

"Through me?"

"In your dreams, I can read your memories, some of them. The things you saw and heard. I do not always know what you think - indeed I rarely do."

"Don't take this the wrong way, but I'm glad you can't."

"I understand. Privacy is important to you, but not as important as making sure the future is safe."

"I'm afraid, Lily. I don't know if I can do this." I wasn't ashamed to admit this to her; it was like telling it to myself, somehow. Except that there was something reassuring about being able to tell her.

"Courage, dear heart. You will not be alone." The dream ended there, and I awoke. It was still night out. I rolled over and slept again, this time dreaming only normal dreams, like turning Malfoy into a frog while playing Quidditch in my underwear.

I went over to see Jason early the next morning. He told me, once we were alone, that he'd had another dream too. We agreed that I'd write to Phil and he'd write to Andy and we'd tell them about our dreams and ask them whether they had any.

Halfway through the day, an owl arrived at Jason's house from Phil. He had obviously written it before he got ours because it said:

Jason - I had another of those dreams last night. Remus was telling me that things had been started that would happen years from now. He also said to trust you, but to be careful of who else I trust.

Did you have one of these dreams? What about Lisa?

An hour later, Jason's owl, Fleetwing, returned with Andy's answer it said:

Yes, I had one of those dreams too! I'll bet Phil had one. I wanted to write to you, but my little sister had dibs - she was writing to a friend who's on vacation in Europe. I wish I had my own owl!

Tell Lisa that if she finds any more information, I'd appreciate hearing it. It is very odd to have your dreams full of long-dead heroes!

The next month, Jason and I tried to have our parents together as often as possible. I also kept dropping little hints to Dad, commenting on the fact that I needed a mother, remarking on how much fun I'd had with Aunt Ellie that day. That was why Jason and Aunt Ellie were in our library on the 31st of July.

We'd had dinner, and were sitting around playing chess, while the adults talked. Suddenly, the windows to the library were flung open and about ten men in black robes came in. They looked surprised to see anyone there.

"Expelliarmus!" Dad yelled, and their wands came flying out of their hands. "Now, do you want to explain why you are coming in the windows?" They just stood there, then tried to leave quickly. Dad shot something at one of them that caused him to lose his balance and fall backwards. He lay there, on the rug, unable to move.

"Patrick! Behind you!" Aunt Ellie screamed. I turned too and saw a man who had come in another window. He started launching lightning bolts immediately. He shot one at Dad, but it missed. The next he shot, though, didn't. It hit Aunt Ellie. With a cry, she fell to the floor.

"Mum!" Jason yelled. We rushed over to her. I saw Dad hit the intruder with something. The man crumpled. Then Dad was standing there.

"I'm all right," Aunt Ellie was saying. But she didn't look it. Her face was white and she was shaking.

"I'm going for a doctor," Dad said. "You two take care of here. Here." He handed Jason his wand, and I picked Aunt Ellie's up from where she'd dropped it. "If they come back, do whatever you have too." He vanished.

Jason and I tried to make her comfortable. We propped her head up on pillows, and told her just to hang on. Dad and the doctor appeared ten minutes later.

"Oh, my, these were nasty people," the doctor said.

"Will she be okay?" Jason asked worriedly.

"Oh, yes, my boy, she'll be fine. Complete bed-rest for a week, I think, though, and she shouldn't be moved too far. Can she stay here?"

"Of course," my dad said. Just then, Ministry workers arrived and started to take care of the V Leaguers Dad had stunned. It was all confusion for the next few hours, and I was glad to crawl into bed and fall asleep when it was all over.

Aunt Ellie stayed with us eight days. Jason stayed too, of course. She did recover completely, but I was a little worried. The V League was very nasty. On the last night that she was at our house, Dad said that the Ministry hadn't managed to get any information out of the Leaguers.

"It's very strange. We tried all the normal spells and such, but it

just didn't work. This is definitely not a normal Voldemort group."

"Do you think we should tell him?" I asked Jason later when we were alone.

"Look, even if he believes us, the Ministry isn't. I mean, how convincing does 'a bunch of dead heroes only we can see has told us that Voldemort isn't really dead at all and will be back in a few years' sound?" His skeptical tone told me exactly how he thought it'd be received, and I had to agree.

"When you put it that way..."

"We'll just wait for the next dream and ask them."

So the end of August drew near. On August 31, Dad took me on a walk. We watched the sun set over the lake in the back yard. Dad looked at me.

"There's something important I have to tell you, Lisa."

"Yes?"

"Well, I'm going to get married."

"To who?" I asked, hardly daring to hope.

"Ellie." I let out a wild whoop. "What was that?"

"I'm so glad! That's wonderful! When's the wedding?"

"Slow down, girl," he laughed. "The wedding will be just after Christmas - we want you and Jason to be part of it, of course. I'm very happy that you're so pleased. What do you think Jason will think?"

"Oh, he thinks it's a great idea. We were really hoping you'd-" I broke off, because a grin had crossed my dad's face.

"So that's what all the mysterious business this summer was! I was wondering. You sneaky little..."

"Well, Dad, can't let down the family name, can I?" I gave him the trademark Black grin, and he returned it.

"You know, your mother should be glad she doesn't have to deal with you anymore."

"Race you back to the house!"

"No cheating!"

Chapter 6

We got back into the swing of things at Hogwarts quickly. It was still the same place, we still slept in the same rooms on the same beds, and there were mostly the same people there. Well, the old seventh years had gone, of course, and there was a load of new students, but mostly everyone was the same.

Including most of the professors. I had hoped that Professor Miranda Snape, who taught Transfigurations, might have left or been fired or even died, but she hadn't. So every class, there I sat, with her glaring at me, ready to pounce at the first opportunity.

And Ari Malfoy was still a pain. He seemed to have gotten over his shame at me pounding the daylights out of him last year. Every class in Potions, he found something to taunt us with. The first class it was about the Quidditch team.

"Slytherin's got a great team this year," he was saying to Zabini, one of his thugs. "I mean, superb! And then there's Gryffindor. Only two players from last year still here! I tell you, they won't win a single match. Of course, they haven't won the Quidditch Cup two years in a row for seventy years, so they probably know it's hopeless."

"When was the last time Slytherin won the Cup?" Andy asked Jason airily.

"Oh, about twenty years ago, I think." he said in just as light a tone. Malfoy went red.

I had a mission. One of the books I had read had indicated that not much was known about Manes, but the best source of information on them was a book called Dead or Not: Spirits, Ghosts, Wraiths and Other Beings. I looked for it in our library, but Dad didn't have a copy. So when we got to Hogwarts, I checked the school library. Sure enough, there was a copy. But it was in the Restricted Section, and there was no way a teacher would let me take a book out of there.

I explained to the boys, one evening, what I was looking for.

"There must be a way," Jason said. "I know! Let's see - yes! Tomorrow is our first Defense Against the Dark Arts class this year."

"So? Professor Addled won't let us take out a book like that."

"Addled retired, didn't you hear? I don't know who's teaching, but we might be able to get something out of him."

"I don't know... What if he wants to know why we want it?"

"Oh, we'll think of something," Phil said. "Chocolate frog?" I accepted, but I was nervous while we ate the snacks. There was a lot that could go wrong...

Just then, we were disturbed by a small first year boy who bumped into our table, spilling books to the floor.

"I'm sorry," he said. "So sorry, very sorry."

"Who are you?" Andy asked. We hadn't seen this kid before; he was short, thin, and had mousy brown hair.

"Oh, I - I'm Ronald Harry James Sirius Remus Albus Rubeus Colin Creevey," he said brightly. We all stared at him. My mouth was ajar;

Andy and Phil were hiding sniggers.

"Um, why on earth did your parents name you that?" Jason asked finally.

"Well, it's kinda a long story - and a bit embarrassing."

"What should we call you?" I asked. "I don't know if I can remember that whole long thing."

"Call me Bo," he said. "Everyone does." This set Andy off again. Well, you gotta admit, a kid with a name like that saying 'call me Bo'... It really was funny.

"Anyway, I know who you all are," he said with a cheerful air. "Jason Potter, Lisa Black, Philip Lupin, and Andrew Weasley."

"Call me Andy," Andy muttered.

"Yeah... I know all about your families, I mean way back there when You-Know-Who was around. Do you know anything cool about that? I like to know stuff about it, if you know anything..."

"No, Bo, we don't like talking about it," Phil said sharply. I could have hugged him. Here's this little kid, talking about an evil wizard he thinks been dead many years, but who we - four children, and no one else - know is still alive. Bo seemed a little upset. He almost visibly wilted as he walked off to join the other first years.

"Anyway, unless our new teacher's a real idiot, I don't see how we'll get the book," I said.

"Let's see what he's like and then figure out a plan." Jason seemed very confident.

"Good morning, class," said our new teacher as he came in. He was about three minutes late, so everyone was already there. The new teacher was young, male, and dark-haired. He smiled cheerfully at all of us.

"I'm Professor Gray, and I'm here to teach you how to defend yourself from every manner of evil creature. Of course, you already know that. First of all, you can put your books away. We won't use them much in this class.

"Now, you'll be learning some difficult magic, things that could injure you if you are not careful. Therefore, I must demand complete obedience and proper attention from every one of you." I let my eyes flicker briefly to my friends. All of them were entranced by Gray's words.

"Today we'll be talking about ghosts." I looked up. What luck! Maybe we could steer the conversation to Manes. "All of you here, have, of course, met ghosts. You've also met poltergeists and probably hinkypunks, which are similar. There are many types of creatures which are characterized as spirits. Some, like Peeves the poltergeist, were never alive. Hinkypunks are like this, too. Ghosts, of course, are the spirits of dead humans, mostly witches and wizards, although there are some Muggle ghosts. Who here knows why

some dead people become ghosts?" Emma Radsson's hand shot up.

"My mother said it's because that person decides to become a ghost, usually."

"That's basically right. However, sometimes spirits do not choose to become ghosts." I straightened and raised my hand.

"Yes, Miss Black?"

"If they don't choose, how do they become ghosts?"

"There are several ways. Some become disembodied spirits because they were evil in life. Sometimes these spirits try to redeem themselves. In that case, they're usually just called spirits. Succubus and Incubus are evil spirits who continue to do as much evil as possible." Now Andy raised his hand.

"Mr. Weasley?"

"Can people who aren't evil become ghosts without wanting too?"

"On rare occasions. These are called Manes." I listened still more closely. "Manes are bound to this earth until their task is complete. The task is usually to avenge their death, if they were killed by an evil person, or they are held here by an oath taken in life." The class was silent.

"Now, let's move on to..."

Well, DADA was a very popular class after that. The next week, Jason and I went to Gray's office to try a plan on him that we'd thought out. He wasn't there, but the door was open, so we went in and sat down. My eye fell on the desk. There was a half-finished drawing of a young girl, no more than twelve, wearing Muggle clothes. I pointed it out to Jason.

"Gray draws? No way! Who do you think this is?" Jason looked disbelieving.

"Maybe he's got a daughter?" I suggested. Still how could he have a daughter this old? The girl looked to be my age and Gray had to be younger than my dad.

"Look, just because your dad couldn't find you for years doesn't mean every wizard has a lost Muggle daughter."

"I know that. Maybe it's his sister."

"These clothes look kinda old. Maybe it was someone he knew as a child?" Just then, we heard footsteps. Leaping away from the desk, we turned to see Professor Gray.

"Can I help you?" he asked politely.

"Well, sir, we were talking about what you said last week about spirits," Jason began. He faltered. I stepped in.

"We wanted to get a book out of the library to find out more. But -but it's"

"It's a restricted book," Jason said. "But we only want it for information, we aren't trying to do any spells. It's called _Dead or Not_." He stopped.

"I see," Gray said. He seemed to consider. "Well, I knew your fathers..."

"You did?" Jason asked.

"Yes. Anyway, I knew them, and I know that even if they'd been up to mischief, they wouldn't lie that way. So I think I can probably trust you two. I'll let you get the book, if you promise that it'll be back in the restricted section in six days."

"Yes, sir," Jason said.

"And don't think you can do this any time you like," Gray said.

"We won't sir," I said. Gray nodded, pulled a quill from his desk, and scribbled a note. He handed it to me. I took it.

I, Professor K. Grey, give these students permission to withdraw Dead or Not from the restricted section of the school library.

"Thank you, sir," I said. We turned and left. Halfway down the hall, I stopped.

"Rats! I left my quill in there. Hold on just a minute, I'll be right back." I hurried back to where the office door stood ajar. I was about to go in, but as I prepared to do so, I saw a strange sight.

Professor Gray was seated at his desk, the half-finished picture in one hand. The other covered his eyes. It looked like he might almost be crying!

I hurried away, wondering what that was about.

AN â€" From here on there are varying POVs. Each is clearly labeled, so just pay attention and you'll be fine.

--

Professor Gray

It was on the second Tuesday that I taught at Hogwarts that two students came asking for permission to get a book from the restricted section of the library. Of course, I should have said no, as they were only second years, but -they were the son and daughter of William and Patrick, two boys I had greatly looked up to at Hogwarts as a student. I had been five years younger, but they were heroes to me. So I decided to let their children take out the book. Anyway, it was about ghosts; not many spells and potions they could make using that.

After they left, my gaze fell on the picture I had tried to draw from the memory in my mind that was still so clear, even after all these years. It wasn't right; no matter how hard I tried, I could not get

it right. I picked it up, intending to tear it to shreds, but couldn't. I almost thought I felt a tear come to my eyes, but that couldn't be. Not over something that I had given up so many years before. And it was probably one of the stupidest things to cry over I could think of; still, remembering made me lonely even yet.

Just then, Miranda walked in to my office.

"McGonagall wants to see you, Gray," she said. Snape didn't like me. I wondered why, for I had certainly done nothing to get on her bad side. Then again, I didn't even know if she had a good side.

"Thank you, Miranda," I said politely. She sniffed and left. I followed. McGonagall's office was a long way off, and she didn't like to be kept waiting.

"There you are, Kevin," Emily said when I got there. "I have a job for you."

"Yes, ma'am?"

"The new Muggle Studies teacher is arriving in Hogsmeade in an hour. I want you to meet her there and make sure she gets here safely."

"I'll be glad to do that."

"I'd do it myself if it wasn't for my bad leg."

"Will you be all right?" The Headmistress didn't often allow herself to show pain, but I was sure she must be in a great deal.

"The Healers say so. That V League operative clearly wasn't very good. But it's still too sore to use."

"Well, I'd best be off."

It was a beautiful fall afternoon, and I whistled as I walked to the village. This trip brought back so many memories...

The train had just gotten in as I arrived at the station. A young woman was the only person to disembark. I went up to her.

"Hello, I'm Kevin Gray," I said. "I'm a professor at-" I stopped. There was something very familiar about this woman...

"Kev?" She asked, in a quiet whisper, hardly any word at all.

"Kath?"

"It is you! I didn't know-"

"You're a witch?"

"I thought you were a Muggle!"

"I thought I'd never see you again!"

"It's been so long! Oh, Kev, oh, Kev!" She threw her arms around my

neck, and I embraced her.

"So," I said when she let go of me, "You're a witch?"

"Yes. I didn't know you were a wizard. Muggle-born like me, I suppose?"

"Actually no. My parents were both wizards, but Dad's job required him to live like a Muggle. We moved back to England when I was old enough to go to Hogwarts."

"So that's where you went. Mum didn't know. I thought so often about writing to you, especially after my letter came, but I didn't know that you were a wizard." She smiled, the same soft smile I remembered from so many years before.

"Well, I am. And I'm a teacher here at Hogwarts, like you. I didn't know it was you, though. McGonagall didn't tell me who was teaching Muggle studies."

"Yes, I got the job. I wrote a book last year, Muggles and Their Environments, by Kathryn Noxi."

"I didn't hear of it. Of course, I mostly read books on the Dark Arts." Noxi? When had she changed her name? Maybe it was just a penname.

"You teach Defense here?"

"Just starting. Come on, this is no place to catch up. Let's go get a drink."

We sat and talked of the years that had passed.

"Do you remember the last time we talked?" she asked softly.

"Yes," I said. "That was when I said that we had to move, that we'd probably never see each other again."

"You kissed me, that day," she said. "I've always remembered that. My first kiss."

"And mine."

"I went home that night and cried myself to sleep. I did that for a long time, even at school. I've never had a friend like you since."

"Neither have I," I said truthfully. "Sometimes I'd dream of flying to your house on my broom and taking you on a moonlight ride..."

"And sometimes I'd look up at the stars and wish so hard that you were there with me."

I looked up, and noticed how dark it was.

"Oh, my! We've lost track of the time! We'd better hurry, or we'll be late."

"What, we'll get detention?" Kath smiled playfully.

"Well, Emily will want to see you right away, and Miranda - well, if you keep her waiting, you'll never hear the end of it."

"We'd best be going, then," she said sorrowfully. I paid the bartender and we headed off for the castle.

"Well, it took you long enough," Emily said acerbically. "What happened, you walk all the way from London?"

"I'm sorry, ma'am," Kath said in her sweet voice, "But Kev and I were old friends. We hadn't seen each other in fifteen years."

"Oh, I see," Emily said, in a slightly softer tone. "Just be sure to be more punctual for your classes, Miss Noxi."

"I will," she said. She left. I watched her go. Emily turned to me.

"Childhood sweetheart?" she asked.

"Not exactly. We were best friends for four years, but then my parents moved back to England so that I could go to school here. I never knew that she was a witch, and she didn't know that I was a wizard."

"I see," Emily said again. "Well, you'd best be off."

But as I fell asleep that night, my mind couldn't take its eyes off of the image of Kath, standing in the moonlight. She was more beautiful than I had remembered. I swore then that there was no way I'd mess up this chance.

Andy - a dream._

I realized it was a dream at once, somehow. I stood in a graveyard, as I had twice before in dreams. A huge black dog appeared to me, but instead of running in fright as I had the first time I'd had this dream, I looked straight at it. "Sirius?" I asked. The dog swelled, transformed and stood upright. It was Sirius Black.

"So," he said. "You have returned." The funny thing about all of this was, Sirius had been probably almost sixty when he died, but the man who stood before me now looked only a few years older than me.

"I guess," I said in reply to his question. "I don't have much choice in the matter, really."

"More choice than I have," Sirius said. "If you ever choose, you can choose to never see me again. What consequences that will have, I cannot say. But it is your choice."

"I think I'll wait a bit longer before making that choice," I said. "Can you tell me anything about the threat that we face?"

"Not much," the Mane admitted. "But it does concern Voldemort."

"How do you know that?"

"If it didn't I wouldn't be here. Voldemort killed me, you know."

"History says that you helped defeat him, that he died there in Azkaban too."

"Yes, well, history is wrong. I should have known that it was too easy. He wasn't human enough to die."

"So how are we supposed to get rid of him?"

"He's more human now than he was then. He's had a long time to recuperate. That makes him more vulnerable in the physical world. And when the time is right, my friends and I will attack him in this world."

"Can you talk to each other?" I asked. Lisa had said that Lily had claimed to be unable to do this.

"No," he said. "We can't. But I know that the time for the double attack will come simultaneously. Then we'll know, because you'll know. Or maybe vice versa."

"You're really not helping matters," I said. He laughed.

"You sound just like old Arthur Weasley. He'd say that all the time when I tried to help him out." I laughed. "Anyway, I'd say you have time to train before the final battle will come. But smaller battles may appear any day."

"Gee, you're encouraging too. It's only my second year, for crying out loud, and you want me to fight the greatest dark lord of all time?"

"If you don't, who will?" I didn't answer. "By the way, you'll need help."

"We've got you guys."

"I'd say you'll need more than that. Start thinking now about teachers and students you can trust. Someday you'll need allies."

"I can tell you now that Ari Malfoy won't be one of them," I said, rubbing my nose where he'd punched me yesterday.

"Don't rule him out ahead of time," Sirius warned, "although, I will admit that the Malfoys who have been decent throughout history can be counted on the fingers of one hand."

"More like one foot," I said under my breath. Sirius caught it, for he gave a great laugh.

"Perhaps you are right. But remember; all that is gold does not glitter."

And with that the dream faded away, leaving me caught in a nightmare of Quidditch games played using frogs for balls and hippogriffs instead of brooms.

Phil - a dream.

I could tell that it wasn't a real dream when I looked up at the moon. It wasn't full. It never was, in these dreams, but in almost all of my normal dreams, it hung like a ripe tomato made of silver.

A dark shape came toward me.

"Philip?" he said.

"Hello, Remus," I answered. "What's up?"

"Not much," he said. "It's rather boring, actually. I'm glad you're back. Brings me into better contact with the outside world." He paused. "It's not -easy - existing like this. Life never was exactly pleasant for me, although there were many good times, but this place is rather awful."

"What kind of place is it?"

"Limbo, it's called. I'll be here until Voldemort is gone. So I do hope that you and your friends defeat him. I am -tired, and I want to rest."

"I don't suppose you know when or where the V. League will next attack?"

"No, but it will be soon. I know that. Actually, it could be happening now and I might not know it."

"A lot of help it is, then, you hanging out here."

"Just because I cannot help you with one thing does not mean I cannot help at all."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean it that way."

"I know. Go now, and sleep peacefully until morning."

I did. Once, my dream threatened to turn into a nightmare; a troll appeared, huge and threatening. But a wolf quickly chased it away, and I fell once more into pleasant dreams.

From the Journal of Kathryn Noxi

Oh, I am so excited to be here! It's the best wizarding school in the world, and I am to teach here! For months I've been trying so hard to get here, and now I've done it. I wouldn't have thought that anything could make me happier. But the best thing is finding Kev again.

We were best friends, and I did have a crush on him for a while. Now, I don't know how I feel, but I do remember how he gave me my first kiss - and my only one. It was always that memory that prompted me to turn down the dates that I was offered throughout school. To find that he is a wizard!

Maybe he can help me. I mean, he is knowledgeable about the Dark arts, and this problem does concern them, I think. I'll ask him on

Saturday.

I have to get ready for my first class now. I can't wait! You'd think I was a schoolgirl again, waiting for my first day at wizard school, that's how nervous and excited I am.

Jason - a dream

I seemed to find myself standing by a lake. The moon shone overhead and was reflected by the still waters. I recognized the place; it was the meadow in back of Uncle Patrick's house, where Lisa and I had spent so many hours flying. There was a reflection in the lake of a silver stag, but when I turned to see it, only a young man stood there. His rumpled black hair and glasses shone a little in the dark.

"So, Jason," he said. "It's good to see you again."

"How long has it been?" I asked curiously. I couldn't remember.

"Time doesn't have the same meaning here that it does for you," James said. "I really don't know, except it's been a while. But I've been waiting far longer for you to come at all." he said.

"I can't imagine what it must have been like," I said.

"No, you can't," he agreed. "Who could? I don't remember ever thinking that I'd end up somewhere like here - mind, my memory isn't always good. So many things have faded. Only a few of my memories shine bright still."

"Which ones?" I asked.

"The day I met Sirius... My wedding... the day my son was born... the day I found I was in love with Lily...and of course, the night I died." Let me tell you, it is weird talking with someone who keeps casually mentioning the fact that he is dead. I shivered. "Oh, it's not as bad as that. And I have a purpose," he said grimly. "I suppose you have my cloak and map?"

"Yes. Mum gave them to me at Christmas."

"I'd suggest practicing with them. They often come in very handy."

"I'll do that."

"Good. Tell me," he said, and I heard a note of longing, "When you talk to your friends about these dreams, do they say what the others have said?"

"The say that we have time, like you told me, and that Voldemort's behind this. Not much else. Why?"

"I haven't spoken to them, of course, since I died. I thought perhaps they'd have left a message for me..."

"No, but I can give a message to be relayed on to any of them," I said.

"No, that's fine," he said, but he hesitated first. "Well - you'd best go. I don't know how much longer you have until morning."

Lisa - a dream.

I recognized the clearing as the one where I had twice before met Lily Potter. Sure enough, she was there, seated on a rock. She smiled at me.

"Sit down," she said. I did so.

"So, what's new?" I asked her.

"Really, there is nothing new to tell you."

"Then why bring me here?"

"I have nothing to do with it," she said.

"Really? I had this idea that you were in control here."

"I have been in control of nothing for a very long time," she said bitterly. "I have been able to see the world, but not touch it. I watched my son grow up, ignored and abused, and was unable to help him. I watched him face Voldemort again and again, and was unable to help. I saw my friends die, and was unable to help. I can see people suffering now, and through you is the only way I can help."

"I'll do anything you need me too," I said impulsively.

"I don't need you to do anything yet, but - there's a new teacher here. Muggle Studies. Something tells me she may be important. You might try to see if you can befriend her."

"I'll do that."

"Good. And don't let those boys drag you into too much mischief."

"Did James and his friends get you in trouble when you went here?"

"All the time." She smiled at the memory. "But they'd always help get me out, too. I miss them so much... But you have to go now! It's morning!"

And I sat up in bed, and the sun streamed in through the windows.

Lisa

Sure enough, the boys had had the Manes in their dreams too. We compared notes. Everything that they said about themselves seemed to back up in the book we'd gotten.

"This is very weird," Andy said.

"You've said that before," Jason reminded him.

"Well, it seems like they've given us some pretty definite tasks," Phil said. "Lisa, you're going to try to talk to the Muggle Studies teacher?"

"If I can come up with an excuse," I said. "You guys going to try to sound out some of the other kids?"

"Yes. Any girls you think we can trust?"

"I don't much like them," I said. "We've never been really friendly, you know. Mostly because I hang out with you three."

"And we need to practice with the Cloak," Jason reminded us. "Anyone have any ideas?" We just sat there. "Well, maybe we'll come up with something."

"How well does it work during the day?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said. "I mean, I'm sure it's fine, but we've never used it except at night."

"Let's try to use it tomorrow sometime," Phil suggested. "It's Saturday, and between the Hogsmeade trip and Quidditch practice, there shouldn't be too many people around."

"Perfect!" Jason said.

"I'll try to talk to the Muggle Studies teacher then," I said. "You guys can watch from under the cloak."

"Good idea. Oops, we'll be late for Potions!" We scrambled up, grabbed our books, and hurried to the dungeons.

"Are you guys there?" I asked, looking over my shoulder.

"Yes," came the reply from seemingly thin air. "Let's go." I thought I knew where the Muggle Studies' professor's office was. I hadn't met her yet, and I didn't even know what excuse I was going to use.

Halfway to her office, I stopped. A woman was hurrying down the hall.

"That must be her," Andy muttered.

"Sshh!" I whispered fiercely. The woman looked up, and I gasped.

The face was the same as that of the young girl I had seen in the picture on Professor Gray's desk.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

"Umm, yes, well, I was wondering," I began, and stopped. I tried again. "You teach Muggle Studies, right?"

"That's right," she said. "I'm Professor Noxi."

"Yes, well, I was going to ask you," I began again. Suddenly,

inspiration struck me, and I remember something. "You wrote a book, right?"

"That's right. Did you read it?"

"Yes. My dad has a copy. I wanted to see what wizards think of Muggles, you know."

"But you said your dad had a copy?"

"Oh, yes. Dad's a wizard, but mum brought me up and she was a Muggle."

"I see," she said. "So was there something you wanted to ask me?"

"Uh, yes. I was wondering, you know, if you were Muggle-born? Because most of the books on Muggles I've read were obviously written by people who've studied them, but don't understand them. Yours seemed different."

"Yes, I was Muggle-born. That's why I'm so interested in Muggle Studies and such."

"I see."

"Well, I have to go now," she said, shifting the notebook she was carrying from one arm to the other. "I have to see Professor Gray about something. If I can be helpful later?"

"Thank you," I said, and got out of the way. I just hoped the boys were smart enough to stay where she wouldn't run into them.

After she'd gone, I let out my breath.

"That was close. What do you think, guys?" I looked around. "Guys? Are you here?" But they seemed to have vanished.

I went back to the common room and sat. I was very exasperated when they finally showed up.

"Where on earth did you go?" I asked. I think my irritation showed in my voice.

"We found out something very important!" Jason said.

"What?"

"Well, we followed Noxi—"

"You did what?"

"Let me finish, okay? She went to Gray's office. We slipped in and stood in the corner."

"Don't you know not to eavesdrop? Oh, go on, tell me what you found out."

"Well, first of all the two of them knew each other before," Andy said.

"I thought so."

"But there's something weird going on! She says she has a problem and needs his help! It must have something to do with the Dark Arts!"

"What is it?"

"I don't know. They left and shut the door behind them. We had to wait until they were far enough away that they wouldn't notice us coming out."

"Great," I sighed. "So all you found out is that there's something going on here."

"But what?" Phil wondered aloud. "Maybe they're working for the V League together!"

"But then why would Lily have told me to befriend her?"

"So that you can spy on her, of course," Andy said.

"I don't think so. I don't know her much, but I think she's nice. And I can't see Gray mixed up in that at all." I was firm about what I thought.

Kathryn

I hurried around the corner away from the girl who had been questioning me. As I did so, I remembered that I had forgotten to ask her name. Oh, well, I'd get it some other time. She had looked curiously familiar; perhaps I had run into her somewhere without realizing it.

I walked up to Kev's office and knocked on the door.

"Come in," he said. I pushed the door open and walked in.

"I need to talk to you," I said.

"Sure, Kath." He smiled. "I've been wanting to talk to you too."

"No, I mean that I have a problem and I think you can help," I said. He frowned.

"What is it?"

"Well, it's - I don't know, really. If it's what I think, then it's a big problem. I really haven't been sure who to trust, but - I knew you for such a long time. I'm sure that I can tell you."

"You can tell me anything," he said. I looked into his eyes. He seemed to be telling the exact truth.

"Well - I don't feel safe here. Let's go somewhere private."

"All right," he said. We walked from his office, shutting the door behind us. He led me outside, to a spot on the grounds where we could

see for a long way around.

"This should be a good place," he said. "Now, what do you have to tell me?"

"When I was researching my book," I began, "I came across some very interesting documents. To be precise, I found a file of letters that appear to be from members of the V League."

"What?" He stared at me. "Did you turn them over to the Ministry?"

"Not yet, because of what they said." I sighed. "If they are genuine, we're in a lot of trouble. Because according to them, Voldemort is not dead."

"How can that be?" he asked, seemingly incredulous. "I mean, there were eyewitnesses, people who would never have lied about that... and it's been a hundred and fifty years! He'd be, what, over two hundred by now?"

"I'm just telling what the letters said," I said. "I've got them here."

"With you right now?"

"No, but in the castle. Somewhere safe, I think." I looked at him. "Kev, I don't know what to do! If they are telling the truth, we're in trouble - but will the Ministry believe it?"

"No," he said. "They won't."

"You seem very sure."

"I am." He looked at me, considering. "I'm afraid I was deceiving you a bit back there, Kath. The truth is, I know that Voldemort is still alive."

"How?" I could barely whisper the words. He smiled grimly.

"When I went to get some practical experience, I ran into some nasty situations. I came out convinced that Voldemort is alive. The Ministry wouldn't believe me at all."

"Why not?"

"They don't want to. Only seven or eight men know what I told them. All but one of them dismissed me as crazy."

"But one, you said."

"Yes. I just got a letter today, from the man in charge of tracking down the V League. He's convinced that I am right. He wants me to come up over Christmas and talk to him about my evidence." He turned to me. "I could tell him about those letters, if you'd like."

I thought for a minute. "I'll go with you, if that's okay with your friend."

"Not exactly friend, although I do know him. But I will send and ask

him. Until then, well, sit on it, okay?"

"That's pretty much what I had planned on."

"Good. Now, what do you say we go down to the Three Broomsticks for lunch?" He smiled at me.

"Sounds great."

It was a few weeks until Christmas when Jason had a brilliant idea.

"Why don't you two come and stay with us over Christmas?" he asked Andy and Phil.

"That would be great," Phil said. "I'd have to check with dad, though."

"Andy?"

"Well, I'd love to. If my parents will let me."

"You write to them, I'll write to my mom," Jason said.

"Actually, Jason, I'll write to Dad. We've got lots of empty rooms, you know. They can stay at our house," I said.

"Sounds good to me," Jason replied. Phil and Andy went off immediately to write to their parents. I sat down and composed a letter to Dad.

Dear Dad, would it be all right if Andy and Phil stayed with us over Christmas? Jason wanted to ask them to his house, but I figured ours was bigger. Please? Love, Lisa.

Dad answered back the next day with a yes. He said it would be good for them to stay with us, actually, since Aunt Ellie was selling her house. Andy and Phil got letters from their families the next day. Both of them were to come.

"Great!" Jason said. "You can hang around for the wedding and everything!"

"I get to be a bridesmaid," I said. "Aunt Ellie sent me a nice dress and everything! It's going to be wonderful." We could hardly wait for the Christmas holidays to begin.

Kathryn

Kevin and I decided to go on the train that would take the students to their homes for Christmas, thereby saving us a long broom flight. Kev sent a letter with our plans ahead, and the reply came that that would be perfect, that he'd pick us up at Platform Nine and Three-Quarters.

"What's wrong?" Kev asked me, jerking me out of my daydream. The countryside flashed by outside the train windows.

"I'm a little nervous, that's all."

"Hey, I told you, he already believes us."

"It's not that, it -well, I'm rather shy, you know."

"I hadn't noticed at all. You don't see to be that way."

"Actually, it's not really shyness. It's just that I don't like spending time with most people. Children are different, and the teachers here are all great. It's just that- well, most people are so boring and -and _stupid_. It's always been my failing. That's why I never had many friends as a child." I blushed, embarrassed to admit my failing.

"You were never that way with me."

"That's because - well, you remember how we met?"

"We were at the same school, and one day you sat near me at lunch and we talked."

"I'd noticed you nearly six weeks before. I didn't much care because all the other children were, well, I thought, stupid. But then I had to compete with you for good grades, and it was hard. That made me respect you enough to try to get to know you. And then, when I asked you over, you beat me at chess." I smiled self-consciously. "I was a pretty self-centered person then."

"I never found you that way." His words made me stop for a minute; I looked at him and saw how sincere he was.

"Well, you were the first kid to ever beat me. I respected that, so I let down my guard enough to know you as a person. And I liked what I saw."

"I see." He looked as if he were about to say more, but turned and looked out the window. "We're coming up to the station." We let most of the train clear before picking up our bags and heading off. Down the platform from us we saw a man and a woman greeting four young people. I recognized one or two of them, but they were all second years; I didn't have any in my class. The man with them looked up and saw us. He said something to his companions and headed for us.

"Hello, I'm Patrick Black. I'm assuming you two are Professors Gray and Noxi?"

"That's right," Kev said. "Call me Kevin, by the way."

"I'm Kathryn," I said.

"Please, call me Patrick. Come with me." He led us toward the woman and children. "Two of my daughter's friends will be staying with me over the holidays," he explained.

"Yes, I know all these mischief makers from my classes," Kev said dryly. The girl -Lisa, that was her name! looked up.

"Professor Gray? Why are you here?"

"Kath and I will be staying with you over Christmas. Your father has

some business to discuss with us."

"You'll be coming with me, kids," the woman said.

"Oh, I haven't introduced you yet!" Patrick clapped a hand to his forehead. "Professors, this is Mrs. Ellen Potter, my fianc  . Ellie, this is Kevin Gray and Kathryn Noxi, both of whom teach at Hogwarts."

"Pleased to meet you," she said with a genuine smile.

"The pleasure is mine," Kev said, taking her hand.

"Jason's your son?" I asked as I, too, shook her hand.

"Yes. Is he in your class?"

"No, I teach Muggle Studies. But Kev teaches Defense Against the Dark Arts."

"I see." She looked at Kev. "That was my husband's specialty."

"Was your husband William Potter?" Kev seemed fairly sure of the answer.

"Yes, he was." There was sadness in her voice, but not too much, and she smiled up at Patrick Black.

"I thought so."

"Did you know him?"

"Well, I knew your husband -and you too, Patrick -by sight at Hogwarts. But I've heard of him in my field." I heard a note in Kevin's voice, of respect, perhaps.

"Anyway, we'd best be off. Come on, you four," she said to the kids. They followed her eagerly.

"We're making a stop in London," Patrick explained. "Some documents to pick up. I didn't want the kids to know; they have incredible curiosity, from what I know about my daughter and Jason, and what I've heard about the others."

"How long do you think this business will take?" Kevin asked.

"Well, how much time can you spare?"

"As long as you need. Neither of us has to be back at Hogwarts until the students get there."

"Well, I'll say nine days. That should give us time to do everything we'll need to. If you don't mind staying over Christmas?"

"Not at all," I assured him. I thought, very briefly, of my sister. I hadn't seen her in many years. Not since I grew up and left. She didn't much care for wizards. We followed Patrick to the waiting car in silence.

Lisa

"Why do you think those two are here?" Jason whispered as his mum led us to her car.

"I haven't got any idea. Dad didn't tell me anything about it."

"You think it has something to do with the V League?"

"Could be. You know," I said, "Noxi's face has been bothering me."

"How do you mean?"

"I almost think I've seen it somewhere else. Not quite her face, really, but something like it, someone's face."

"Do you know anyone from America?"

"Just my family."

"Your mum is English, right?"

"Actually, I don't think she is. She always talked about growing up in Connecticut. I don't think she was lying."

"Maybe you met someone from Noxi's family and don't know it."

"Kind of an unusual name, isn't it? I mean, she doesn't look like she's any kind of ethnic group, to have a name like that." We fell silent then as we got into Aunt Ellie's car.

"Your dad has to pick up some stuff in London," she said. "So I'm driving you home."

"What?" I asked.

"Lisa, it's nearly Christmas. Don't you know better than to ask those kinds of questions?"

"All right." We fell silent. I was sitting in the front; the three boys sat together in the back.

"That's right," Aunt Ellie said suddenly. "I remember Gray from Hogwarts. He was a few years younger than I was, but I knew that I knew him."

"Did you know Professor Noxi?" I asked curiously.

"No, I don't think I ever met her. She does seem vaguely familiar, though. Oh, well, I'll remember if it's important."

"Mum? What business do they have here?"

"Jason, first of all, you shouldn't ask questions like that. If you were supposed to know, we'd tell you." _Wrong thing to say, Aunt Ellie,_ I thought. That was the best way to get us curious that I could think of. I was convinced that it had to do with the V League. Most things did, these days, it seemed.

Our house was lovely. It was ready for Christmas.

"I hope you don't mind," Dad said. "We have so much to do this year, what with the wedding and everything." Lots of boxes stood everywhere; things from the Potters' house that they wanted, presents, boxes full of books that my dad had bought. It looked as if we were moving out. Jason moved into a room near mine immediately.

"Mum says that our house is practically empty, and I might as well move in now," he said. "She spends all her days and some of the nights here anyway." I'd noticed that. Andy and Phil shared the biggest guest bedroom we had, which was right near mine and Jason's; our other guests had rooms quite a ways away.

"Don't want them kept up all night by you youngsters," Dad had said. "It's not like we don't have the room." The four adults spent most evenings in the library. The first night, we tried to play chess there, but Dad chased us out.

"Something is definitely up," Phil said, pacing my room on the third night. "We've got to find out what!"

"Well, how?" Jason asked dispiritedly. "We can't sneak in; you know they're doing warding spells. We can't eavesdrop because we can't use magic... there's nothing we can do."

"Hold on," I said. "We can't use magic, sure."

"So?" Andy asked. "What are we supposed to do?"

"Muggle stuff," I said. "We'll bug them."

"Look, bothering them won't help," Phil said, but Jason's eyes lit up.

"No, not that kind of bug," he said. "Muggles call it 'bugging' when there are little listening devices hanging around. It won't be magic, so we won't get caught."

"Where do we get the bugs?" Phil asked.

"We'll buy them tomorrow," I said. "Do you have any money?"

"Um, I have three galleons," Andy volunteered.

"Muggle money," I clarified.

"Nope."

"No."

"I've got seven quid," Jason said.

"Dad gave me some over the summer, and I've still got most of it." I grinned. "Tomorrow night, we'll be able to hear what they have to say."

Kathryn

Patrick Black had a very fancy manor house. It had to be centuries old, it had dozens of rooms, and it sat on a large estate. The house was a bit of a mess, but I gathered that Mrs. Potter was in the process of moving in. Apparently, they'd be getting married in about a week.

The four children hung around a lot. I could tell that they knew something was afoot; they kept trying to sneak into the library in the evenings when we had our conversations. All four of them were very bright, but very mischievous.

The first night, we sat in the library. Kevin seemed a bit impatient.

"Will you tell us now what was in all those boxes we helped you carry?" he asked. Patrick smiled.

"Mostly files, things we'll find useful."

"Where did it come from?"

"Oh, some of it is from the Daily Prophet, some is from other sources. Most comes from old League files."

"The V League?" I asked.

"No, an older, and far more noble, League. The League Against Voldemort."

"Never heard of it," I began, but Kev sat up.

"Of course! I've run across mentions of it. There aren't too many facts about it, but it is thought that Voldemort was afraid of the members of the League."

"Possibly why his organization has the name it does," Ellen Potter commented.

"Good point," Patrick said. "We'll go through all these papers, looking for anything that might help us convince the Ministry that Voldemort really is alive."

"How did you get these files?" Kevin asked, curious.

"I -well, to be precise, I stole them." He went a bit red. "Nobody's used them in years, but the Ministry won't let anyone take them. They shouldn't be missed, and we do need them." No one said anything to this. "Right. Well, let's get started."

For three nights we read the files together, searching for clues, but not finding any. Late on the fourth night, Ellie stood, stretched, and said:

"Well, I'm off to bed. I do hope you find something soon, though. I don't want our married life to be this dull." She laughed.

"I guess Grace found it that way," Patrick said. I looked up fast.

"Grace? Was that your wife's name?"

"Yes, it was." He looked at me. "Why?" Pieces of a puzzle were starting to click together.

"Of course," I whispered. "That's who Lisa looks like."

"Lisa doesn't look anything like her mother," Ellie said. "Do you know her?"

"Yes -I think so. And I don't think Lisa looks like her mother. I think she looks like -me." There was a silence in the room. I continued. "I had a sister, a few years older than I was, named Grace. She was Muggle, through and through. In fact, my family didn't approve of wizards or magic. They -well, when I was grown, they basically disinherited me."

"Grace's maiden name wasn't Noxi," Ellen said.

"Kath's name isn't Noxi either," Kevin commented. "I was wondering why you changed it."

"Because they wanted nothing to do with me, so I left and got rid of their name. I had my pride. My sister had already married and divorced you by the time I left," I said to Patrick. "I didn't know her husband's name, and I only saw her daughter once. I'd completely forgotten the girl's name."

"Well," Patrick began, struggling for words, "This is unusual."

"That's an understatement," Kev said.

"I - I need to go to bed, I think," I said. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to get things so messed up."

"You didn't," Patrick said. "And it'll be nice for my daughter to have an aunt. If you want her to know."

"Oh, sure," I said. I was a bit distracted. "Um, if you'll excuse me..."

"We should all go now," Kevin said. "No doubt the boys will be up at dawn with some explosion or something." We laughed and headed off.

Kev and I stopped in front of the door to my room.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. "I just haven't thought much about that time for a while. I was remembering that one science class when our teacher forgot her scissors, and no one else had them either, remember?"

"As I recall, I made a very obnoxious joke," he said.

"It was funny. You said something about not being allowed to bring weapons to school. We'd been hearing about that girl who got expelled for bringing a butter knife, remember?"

"Yes. I suppose it was funny, at that." He grinned down at me. "Hey, you're shaking." His grin changed to a look of concern.

"I'm fine," I said.

"You sure? You look ill."

"I'm not," I said again. I felt -funny. But not sick or anything like that. More like the way you feel when you're about to do something you've been waiting for for a long time, or when you're very nervous. Or both. "I-" I began, and stopped. I reached out and took his hand. He was trembling a bit, too. He pulled me close to him.

"Oh, Kath," he whispered. "I love you."

"I love you," I echoed back. He kissed me, then, gently. It felt just the way I had remembered from so many years ago, at first, but it got firmer in a moment. My hands were twined around his neck, and my eyes were closed. _So this is what being in love is all about,_ I thought. It sure seemed like it was everything that it was supposed to be.

Lisa

The plan worked great. We located a baby monitor in the Muggle shops in the village and bought it. Then Jason, hidden in the Cloak, hid the monitor on a bookcase full of books about obscure potions, venomous plants, and Cornish Pixies. We put the other part in my room.

"I hope the batteries hold out," Jason said.

"What's batteries?" Andy was curious.

"Never mind."

"Sshh!" I thought I'd heard something. Then I definitely heard my dad.

"Where did we leave off last night?" he said.

"We were just finishing off this box," Gray's voice came through loud and clear.

Anyway, I won't record the whole conversation, but it was obvious that they were talking about the V League, and that they knew that Voldemort was still alive.

"That's a relief," Phil said. "They'll be sure to tell the Ministry."

"What if they aren't believed?"

"Jason, of course they'll be believed."

"Hmm," said Jason. "Let's see. 'Hello, Minister, we believe that Voldemort, who you think died many years ago, is in fact alive and behind these attacks. No, we don't have any proof, but we're sure.'"

"How do you know they don't have proof?" Andy asked.

"Oh, come on! If my dad had proof, they wouldn't be sorting through boxes of old papers down there, they'd be talking to the Minister, at least."

"They're breaking up!" Phil said suddenly. "Quick, let's get to bed."

The next night we came into my room again. Half past ten, the batteries gave out.

"Darn!" said Jason. "Stupid Muggle junk. Always dies when we need it. Well, we'd best just go to bed." They left, and I clambered into my bed. It didn't take long to get to sleep.

A clearing, familiar, and Lily. She turned to me. 'You are in danger. The V League will be attacking your home any moment now. Go quickly!' _

I woke, panting. The impact of my dream hit me. I jumped out of bed, pulled on my robe, and pulled my wand from the bag near my bed. I rushed out the door. Halfway down the corridor, I met the boys.

"You had the same dream?" Phil asked. I nodded.

"I think they're still in the library. Hurry!"

They were, and the door was locked by magic.

"They'll never hear us through that spell," I said.

"Stand back," Jason said grimly. He leveled his wand at the door and yelled, "_Reducto_!". It exploded in a blast of sound and light.

"What?"

"Hey!" Confused voices came from within.

"The V League is attacking!" I yelled. Dad rushed to action.

"Get in here!" He pulled us in. The other adults had their wands out and were staring around. Just then, I saw something move in the hall.

"There!" Dad shot something at it from his wand. The shape cried out and lay still. I looked around.

Aunt Ellie looked scared but calm. Noxi -actually, Aunt Kath, as she'd said to call her earlier that day- held her wand ready. She didn't look a bit afraid, but her lips were white. She kept looking at Professor Gray.

The next few minutes were very confused. All I can remember of it was a lot of noise and smoke. Finally, it was all over. Ministry workers arrived about five minutes too late, but just in time to help clear up the mess. It was about four in the morning by the time they all

left and took the attackers with them. We were all in the library then, all eight of us. Dad looked at us kids.

"All right," he said, and his voice was deceptively gentle. "How did you know that there was to be an attack?" We exchanged confused looks. Phil and Andy looked at Jason and me.

"Well, they're your parents," Phil said finally, with a shrug.

"Oh, thanks," Jason groaned. "Well, it's a bit of a long story..."

"Go right ahead," Aunt Ellie said dryly.

"Basically, we were warned in dreams," Jason said.

"Dreams?" Dad was skeptical.

"Lisa, you're the one who did all the research. Why don't you explain."

"Great." I faced the adults. "Well, it's kind of complicated. The gist of it is, we see people in our dreams."

"People?" Gray frowned. "Explain."

"Dead people," Andy clarified. "And they tell us stuff."

"You see dead people in your dreams?" Noxi's brow was furrowed.

"Um, yeah." I looked around for help.

"Any particular dead people?" Dad prompted.

"Well, yes. Phil sees Remus Lupin. Andy sees Sirius Black. Jason sees James Potter. And I see Lily."

"So, you're saying you see _dead heroes_ in your dreams?" Dad was incredulous.

"Yes. And they said that Voldemort isn't dead, that's he's coming back. And that we have to stop him. The four of us, that is," I ended miserably. I couldn't say what was dominant in the adults' faces - surprise, fear, disbelief, curiosity, amazement or concern.

"If it was just one of them, I'd say it was clearly a delusion," Noxi was saying. "But the four of them - and those four!"

"But how?" Aunt Ellie looked as though she might faint.

"They're Manes," Phil put in. It seemed rather ridiculous to me how the adults were talking over our heads, as if we weren't there.

"Of course." Gray sounded amused. "That's what you wanted that book for. How long has this been going on?"

"Oh, about a year now."

"And you didn't tell anyone?" Dad stared at me. "You didn't tell me?"

Why?"

"Let's see, I'm going to say 'Dad, my friends and I have dead heroes coming into our dreams, and they say that Voldemort is alive, and that we have to stop him, and I know I'm only twelve and don't know much magic yet, but I really am telling the truth, even though I have no proof.' Yeah, right."

"This is an unusual occurrence," Gray began. "Let me ask you a few questions."

Actually, it was more like a few dozen questions. It wasn't until we were almost falling asleep on our feet that Dad said that we should go to bed. By now, dawn was painting its way across the sky. I realized, suddenly, that it was Christmas Eve now, and that the wedding was only a few days away. But as I got into bed and fell asleep, I didn't much care.

Kathryn

The attack unsettled me a great deal, and the strange revelation from the four children made me even more nervous. As a result, I was quite happy to go back to London the day after Christmas. Thankfully, Patrick had to go anyway and said he'd drive us up - he needed the car. So I didn't have to go into the same complicated rigmarole and lame excuses that I usually used when... Oh, well, anyway.

We'd agreed that we wouldn't tell anyone about the kids seeing the Manes. Frankly, I didn't think they'd believe us anyway. They'd been awfully shy around Kev and me ever since the night of the attack; I don't think they wanted to push their luck too far.

We booked rooms at the Leaky Cauldron for the rest of the holidays and tried to plan our next step.

"There must be evidence somewhere," Kev said the first evening. "The V League has some, but I can't see us getting it from them. We've been through what the Ministry has -where else might we look?"

"Wait a minute," I said slowly. "I heard, a few years back, that there was going to be a museum about the struggle against Voldemort. There might be more records there."

"Do you know where it would be?"

"As a matter of fact, I do. It's in the United States. Washington, DC. They've got a real thing about museums there. I think some old wizard died and left his fortune to build this museum, on the condition that it was built there, not here."

"Hmm. We'll have to check it out. It'll take too long to get there the Muggle way - we'll have to Apparate. Are you up for it? It's a long trip."

"No." I said it flatly.

"Well, I can probably find a range-booster in Diagon Alley somewhere. Have you used one before?"

"No."

"Oh, I thought that was standard when learning how to Apparate. They aren't too difficult to use."

"No, that's not what I meant." I took a deep breath and wished I were a thousand miles away. "I can't Apparate."

"You never learned? But surely-" He looked puzzled. I interrupted him.

"No, I just can't do it."

"I've never heard of that before. It's not high-level magic. Fifth years could do it, if they were taught."

"I am physically unable to Apparate. I also cannot brew any type of potion. I am sure you understand why I don't like talking about it." I was always pitied, whenever people knew. I hated that. "But I can do any Charm ever made, and I can speak to any kind of bird." I felt as if I had to defend myself somehow.

"Eyrespeech? That's very rare."

"Yes. So I don't need your pity. I'm fine just the way I am."

"Okay. Well, four days really wasn't enough time to search anyway. Maybe this summer we'll go and make a good long hunt for anything we can come up with. Does that sound good to you?" I stared at him. I hadn't wanted pity, but I was surprised that he seemed so uninterested. He looked at me and seemed to read what I was thinking. "Kath, I wouldn't care if you couldn't levitate a feather, change a match into a needle, or bewitch a beetle. I love you. The fact that you are brilliant, a witch, and beautiful is a bonus, but I think -am sure- that I would love you even if you weren't any of those things."

"Kev, I like you, and you're a really good friend, but I'm not sure that I really love you. What I felt the other night - I don't know if that was real. So I want to take my time here, be sure, all right?"

"Of course. But I wanted you to know that I love you, no matter what." He got up then and left. I wanted to call after him that I did love him, but I felt afraid.

It had been so long since I'd opened myself up to anyone, because whenever I did, I got hurt. I remembered my mother and sister, who had hated me for my gifts. I remembered the girls at school who had shunned me for many reasons. I wasn't going to risk that, not unless I was sure.

But as I tried to sleep, the thought kept coming to me. _What if it's already too late?_

3. History

Lisa

"I'll ask Mum if you guys can come stay!"

"Be sure to write!"

"See you in the fall!" Ah, yes all the sounds of Platform Nine and Three- Quarters on the first day of the summer holidays. I saw Dad and Aunt Ellie standing at one end of the platform with carts for Jason's and my trunks. They were smiling at us as we ran over.

"Hey, Dad!"

"Hi guys!"

"Did you have a nice term?"

"Yeah, everything was great." I looked at the carts. They already had a couple of bags on them. "What are those?"

"Those are ours," Aunt Ellie smiled. "We're going on a trip."

"Really?"

"Where?"

"Hold on! We've got to get a train to the airport. We're going on a plane."

"To where?"

"America." I stared at Dad.

"Why on earth are we going there? You said we might go to France in August, you didn't say anything about America."

"I have some business there, so we thought we'd make it a family trip."

"Great! I've never been to America. Where are we going?" Jason was excited and eager.

"Florida, for a while." Aunt Ellie smiled at Jason again. "Then, maybe, someplace else, depending." I saw her give Dad a quick glance. I looked at Jason, and he at me. I could tell that he was thinking what I was: something was up.

Planes are fine, really, especially if you're a kid. But I really prefer brooms for flying. On a broom, you can feel the wind in your hair, it seems like you're moving faster than anything else. On a plane, you're in a closed compartment. You might as well be sitting at home in a closet. And a Trans-Atlantic plane flight takes a long, long time. Magic is definitely superior to Muggle technology in some areas.

Anyway, I'm not sure how long the trip took, but it was late night when we got there. Dad had booked us rooms at a wizard inn for the

next two days, and then we were going to a Muggle hotel, not fifty feet from the beach.

The Muggle hotel was really incredible, but I liked the beach most. When we got there, it was high tide, and no one was allowed to go in the water, but pretty soon it got better. Dad said not to go out too far, because of the undertow, but there was a sandbar about a hundred feet offshore. If you swam just a short distance, you could stand in knee-high water and look at the fish swimming by. And the waves were big enough that in chest-deep water, they'd lift me off my feet for a minute. I thought that was great fun.

I know, I was thirteen, but for a couple of days, I felt like a six year old. Jason and I did all sorts of things, like building a sand model of Hogwarts, and burying Dad up to his neck in sand, and searching for the best seashells. They were a bit hard to find, because the surf was so rough that most were damaged before reaching shore. But that meant that the sand was very fine and soft.

It was great fun, but Dad seemed very preoccupied. Sometimes Aunt Ellie took Jason and me to do things, and Dad would say he wanted to stay in the hotel. But once, we got out early, and he wasn't at the hotel. I thought he looked as if he hadn't been getting enough sleep, too.

"This must have something to do with the V League," I said to Jason one night.

"You'd think he could tell us," Jason said in disgust. "I mean, he knows about the whole Mane thing - that stuff still freaks me out whenever I think about it too hard, you know."

"Well, he's an adult," I said. "They're all the same. They don't think that anyone who isn't twenty-five can have anything valuable to add."

"Tough luck," he said. "I mean, it sure looks like we're going to have to help save the world." I couldn't help it, I just started laughing. I rolled around on my bed, howling. Jason threw a pillow at me, so I jumped up and grabbed one too. In ten seconds, a royal pillow fight was taking place.

"I give up, I give up!" I yelled as I fell backward after one particularly hard blow.

"Eh, are you sure you're the same girl who gave Malfoy a black eye two years ago?"

"Yes." I grinned up at him. "Except I don't beat people up any more."

"Too bad. I know a few you could try." Just then, the door opened.

"What is this?" Aunt Ellie stared at the mess with surprise. "Where did all these feathers come from? What a mess!" We looked around. She was right. Feathers still drifted down to the floor, the beds were completely unmade, and a bucket of seashells were spread all over the floor. Then we looked at each other. Jason had feathers in his unruly black hair, and his glasses were askew. I was sure I looked equally

funny. We started laughing again.

"It isn't funny, you two!" She began, but she broke down laughing too. "All right, clean this up. We're going to be moving on in the morning."

"Where?" Jason asked sharply.

"Wait and see. It's a surprise."

Kathryn

"This is fruitless," I said after two days of sorting through old boxes and papers. "If there's something in here, we'll never find it. This stuff is useless to us." Kev was pacing up and down.

"Well, I didn't spend all this time and effort to get us in here to give up so easily. There has to be something useful here."

"Yes, but to who?" I shut the box I was working on with a snap. A nearby envelope fell over and spilled its contents. "Great." I started shoving the papers back in. "Look, it's a photograph," I said. "Oh, look - it must be the Potters."

"Which ones?"

"James and Lily, of course. I can see the resemblance between James and Jason."

"Hold on," Kevin said slowly.

"What, Kev?"

"You said that this stuff wasn't useful to us, right?"

"Yes, I did. It's not."

"Not to us." He emphasized the last word and looked at me. "Who might it be useful to?"

"Someone who knows more about Voldemort," I said. "But who? Nobody alive knows anything about him. We're the closest thing to experts."

"No one alive," he said, again emphasizing the last word. "But we don't have to limit ourselves to live people."

"You mean the Manes?"

"Yes, I do."

"Kev, that's -that's crazy! The only people who can talk to them are a bunch of kids! Thirteen year old kids!"

"So? Harry Potter had defeated Voldemort three times before he was thirteen."

"But - but he was Harry Potter. You know that."

"Kath, it may be crazy, but it's also the best plan we've got."

"It's the only plan we've got," I muttered, tacitly giving in.

"Good. I'll write to Patrick tonight. But for now, we're leaving these moldering documents and going to see some sights."

"You know, DC is exactly the way I'd remembered it from when I was a kid." I looked around at all the sights.

"You came here?" Kevin seemed surprised.

"Yes, the summer I was ten."

"That's right, I'd forgotten."

"That was the last year before I found out I was a witch. My sister and I were still friends. She took me all over the city to see things. We climbed the stairs to the top of the Washington Monument, can you believe that?"

"It's beautiful here, but so crowded."

"If you think it's crowded here on the Mall, we shouldn't go to any of the Smithsonian. I was thinking of going to look at the dragons."

"They have dragons?"

"Yeah, they call them dinosaurs. Just bones, you know, mostly what's left after a dragon-hunter gets through with them. They put them together wrong, too, but they have fun."

"Hmm. Anything outdoors we can do?"

"Well, we could go up to the Chesapeake and sail."

"It's going to rain by late afternoon. We haven't got time."

"Oh. How about Arlington National Cemetery?"

"A graveyard?"

"Come on, you'll see."

We stared at the rows of graves, next and orderly.

"They all killed each other," Kevin said. "And why? What nonsense, anyway? They called it a Civil War. At least the English Civil War didn't kill this many people."

"Sure, but Charles' head got cut off. They didn't kill Jefferson Davis."

"They killed Lincoln."

"That wasn't war, that was assassination. It's a shame that they put this here, though. Poor guy couldn't use his house any more, not with all these dead guys buried here."

"Who lived here?"

"Lee, the Confederate General. If he'd had more men, he might have won." I smiled. "Sometimes, in books, he reminds me of how Albus Dumbledore must have been. Brilliant strategist, and he was in control during the whole war. Not like the North; they went through generals like you go through socks."

"They did win."

"Yes, but it might have gone differently, especially if our kind had gotten involved. But we were too smart." I led him through the trees to a particular grave. "This was one of my ancestors. He was killed in the Civil War. Family tradition says that he and his twin shot each other; they were on opposite sides. Things like that did happen, you know."

"That's awful."

"Come on, let's go down there." I pointed to a place where we could see the Potomac River in the distance. We sat down on the grass. I realized it must be late; the sun was setting. I almost thought I could see the first stars. A small breeze blew through the trees. I gave a shiver.

"Should we go?" Kev asked, looking at me.

"No," I said. "It's so pretty here. The stars are coming out. I don't get to see them enough at Hogwarts, it's always so cloudy."

"I know." He pointed up at one. "That's Mars, I think. It's so bright out tonight that I can't quite tell."

"It's not flickering," I said. "That means it must be Mars or Venus. Real stars twinkle." I looked up and sighed. "I never wished on the same star twice in a row. Kind of a superstition with me. I always thought that someday I'd hit the right one, and I'd have any wish I wanted."

"I don't know that it ever worked for me," he said, staring up, "But I'd try and try, every night, until I was too old to believe that sort of stuff."

"But really, in a magical world like ours, how do we know what's ridiculous and what isn't?" I spoke slowly.

"Maybe that's true," he said. He put his arm around me. "If so, I know what I'd wish for."

"And I don't think you'd need a star to make it come true." I looked at him and smiled. I could just make out the smile on his face through the darkness.

"You said before you needed some time to decide. Has it been long enough?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then, Kathryn Whatever-Last-Name-You-Want, will you marry me?"

"Yes," I said again. "And Kathryn Gray sounds like a good name to me, don't you think?"

"Beautiful," he said with a grin. Then he kissed me.

"Hey! What are you doing there? We're closing!" We looked up. A guard was yelling at us. Kev grinned sheepishly.

"We'd best be going." We walked away, back toward the city.

"We should get some dinner," I said. "I am hungry."

"All right." He felt in his pocket. "I don't have much Muggle money, just a few dollars. What about you?"

"Same here."

"Well, I guess we'll go there." He pointed to a big McDonalds across the road. "Fries?" I laughed.

We sat and ate hamburgers, watching the Muggles come and go.

"They look so flustered," Kevin commented. "It's as if they never relax."

"They don't, most of them." I looked after a mother and her two boys. "I've done a lot of observing of them. I -oh, do you mind? I have a tendency to talk about my specialty for ages until everyone's bored to tears."

"Go ahead. I won't cry."

"Well, most of them are stressed out," I said. "And -well, the Ministry's propaganda says that they won't believe anything about us, but that really isn't universally true. A lot of them, I think, know subconsciously about us. Look at that," I gestured at a kid sitting and reading a book. "See? She's reading a book about magic. Not like our kind, but some Muggles do seem to want to believe in magic. And of course, almost every child believes. They have to be taught not to. That's where the public education system comes in."

"Really?"

"Yes. Oh, I don't have proof, but I think that's one of the places our kind has fooled around in over the years. They usually aren't taught to think for themselves, you know, but to accept what 'everyone knows' as true. Very convenient for us."

"Anything else we've done to them?"

"The whole nuclear power thing, I'm sure. I think that there are probably records that show that we caused the hysteria about a nuclear war back in the 1960s or whenever. They're still getting over that. It's held them back for years. You know, their science will catch up to us someday. Then we'll be able to show ourselves. I think the Ministry should encourage that, but, well, I'm not Minister."

"No, that moron Wood is."

"I know that he called us crazy when we tried to talk to him about Voldemort, but, Kev, the story is a bit improbable."

"Yeah. Right."

"It is, you know that." I changed the subject. "Are you going to send the owl to Patrick tonight?"

"Yes. We should head back before it gets too late."

"Fine with me." We walked out and back to our hotel.

Lisa

"Will you tell us where we're going now?"

"No."

"We've been in this dumb car for hours! When will we get there?"

"Later. Read or go to sleep or something. I have to concentrate on driving. Why can't these Americans drive on the correct side of the road?" Jason and I pulled out a map.

"What big cities are near here?" I asked.

"Um, well, up there is New York, that's a big one."

"Wait, where are you looking?"

"Isn't this where we are?"

"No, silly, that's Pittsburgh there. We're down here in South Carolina. Sheesh."

"Well, Lisa, you're the one who used to live here. I don't even understand the language."

"What are you talking about? It's English."

"No, it's American Muggle, and I speak Wizard English. All the words seem to mean something else."

"Well, the first time you said you used a torch to read in bed, I had a vision of you holding a flaming brand under the covers."

"Well, 'flashlight' isn't any better."

"I think it is. And you call food by different names -next time we're in a restaurant, it'll help if you order a cookie if what you want is what you call a biscuit."

"I thought it was weird that they gave me a scone instead."

"That's 'biscuit' in American. They didn't just declare independence from the king back in 1776, they declared independence from the King's English too."

"I see that. You probably know a lot about that, having lived here as a Muggle for so long."

"Sure. I can name all the signers of the Declaration of Independence in order of signing. I can name the places where the great battles were fought, list the presidents in order, and sing the National Anthem -without breaking."

"I am _so_ impressed."

"All right, fine, go to sleep or something."

"What about English history?"

"Um, I don't know much. I mean, they don't teach that at Hogwarts. In America, we learned that King Arthur defeated the Romans -or maybe Napoleon, I'm not sure - and built Stonehenge and had seven or eight wives, which he beheaded. And then George III took over and we left. Oh, and the Pilgrims came over, and then America went and helped England out in the World Wars. And somewhere in there, Ivanhoe drove out the Normans, but he was a Saxon and they were bad guys until the Normans came in and -oh, gee, it's confusing. I was more interested in the War of the Roses and Guy Fawkes. At least that was bloody and stuff. A bunch of witches got burnt - of course, they weren't really witches. Americans think themselves more civilized because they hanged their witches, didn't burn them at the stake. We learned all of English history in about three days, and then had to move on to China."

"I see. So don't be surprised when I tell you that my knowledge of American history -well, I think that Ben Franklin created the stove and invented the light bulb, then George Washington came along on a horse and the three of them - Franklin, Washington, and the horse - somehow beat the British. And Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence and then Lincoln started the Civil War and got killed. Then they tried to fool around in Europe and they had a Depression, until Hitler and Grindelwald came along and caused another world war. And then they sent someone to the Moon."

"That was pathetic."

"Yeah, well, I'm not interested in Muggle American history."

"I see." I looked up front. "Hey, Dad! Are we almost there?"

"Ellie, punch them for me."

"Yes dear." She didn't turn around. Jason and I laughed.

"Hey!" I said. "I'll bet we're going to DC!"

"Where?"

"Washington DC. It's called DC, or Inside the Beltway, or other things like that. The capital city!"

"Oh. Have you been there?"

"No, and I hear it's got some great things to do. The subways, and the museums, and there's a bunch of old dudes running things worse than the Ministry of Magic."

"That's impossible."

"No, merely difficult. Anyway, politicians never care that something is impossible, they try to do it anyway. Look, we're only twenty miles away from it."

"Great. I'm going to sleep. Wake me up when something's happening." He put his head back. I pulled out a book and tried to read, but my mind wasn't on it.

I had had a dream last night, a Mane dream, and Jason hadn't. I hadn't mentioned that I'd had one, since he hadn't had one. This was the first time that I'd had one alone. I thought back to Lily.

The moon shone on the rock where Lily sat. I could see her face, glowing in the moonlight. She looked very peaceful.

"Hello, Lily," I said, crossing to her stone.

"You're growing fast." She looked me over. "You'll be ready to face Voldemort any time now."

"But, Lily, I don't know enough! I cannot face him! I'm -I'm too scared," I said, finally voicing my deepest fears.

"Lisa," she said kindly, looking at me, "Do you really think that I was brave in facing him?"

"Yes, of course," I said.

"No, I wasn't. It was something that had to be done, and I had to do it. This is something that has to be done."

"It may kill me too."

"It may," she said calmly. "You are surprised that I do not try to soothe away your fears? What would be the point? You know that it is dangerous. You also know that you will do it."

"Because of the boys," I said. "I can't let them go into that kind of situation alone."

"If that is the excuse you need, so be it," she said softly. "But Lisa. You are brave, far braver than you think. Remember that. Also, remember that there are many kinds of bravery. It takes one kind to stand up to Voldemort. It takes another to live day by day."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Not yet. But you will, Lisa. You will." She sighed. "I wish that you did not have to do this, but you must. There is no one else to do it. Take courage, Lisa. You will do well. You will."

An hour later, we pulled up in front of a hotel in Washington. Dad helped carry all the bags in, then he went off somewhere.

"Well, where'd he go?" Jason asked.

"I don't know. I guess we'll have to wait and find out." We didn't have long to wait. Ten minutes later, we saw him come back.

"Who's that with him?" Jason wondered.

"Hey -that's Gray and Noxi!"

"I wonder what they're doing here?" We didn't have long to wait. Aunt Ellie brought us over to the room where the adults were conversing. They stopped when we came in. Dad looked at us.

"Sit down," he said. "We've got some things we need to tell you." We sat. "The reason I'm here, and they are here -in America, that is - is to try to find information about Voldemort that we can use against him, or to convince the Ministry that he really is alive. We haven't been able to find anything, and we've been looking through a lot of old records."

"So what does this have to do with us?" Jason asked, his voice steady. Noxi -she might be my aunt, but I always thought of her as Noxi - spoke quietly.

"It occurred to us that we might very well have uncovered something important but not know it," she said. "So we decided we'd better ask you."

"Ask us?" I was shocked. Since when did any adult think that kids might be able to see something they couldn't? Even if it was true.

"You do speak to the Manes," Gray said.

"Yes," Jason admitted. "Oh, I see. You want us to ask them about it."

"Exactly."

"Um, you do remember that we have no control over it, right? We haven't spoken with them in months." I wriggled a little as he spoke. That wasn't quite true.

"I know that they're still there," I said slowly. "Somehow, I think we'll know when they go."

"Anyway, you two are going to go tomorrow to start looking at the records," Dad said.

"Thrilling," I said.

"I know it's not a very good vacation," Noxi began, "But-"

"Oh, I understand," I said. "I understand perfectly well-" But I started to cry and ran from the room. I flung myself face down on the bed in the next room, and just cried. A minute later, I heard the door open and shut softly. I looked up, expecting to see Dad or Aunt Ellie. But it wasn't. It was Noxi. She crossed to the bed and sat down beside me. I tried to wipe my eyes, but I just started crying harder.

"There, there," she said, speaking soothingly to me. "I do understand, you know."

"How can you?" I looked at her. "How can you understand what this is like? I'm thirteen years old! And yet I have to help save the world."

"I know," she said. "And instead of worrying about your hair or clothes or even grades, you're worried about Voldemort. I've watched you -you don't have any girl friends at Hogwarts, do you?"

"I'm always afraid I'll let something slip," I said. "What would happen if I did?"

"What indeed? So you lock yourself up. The boys don't understand, do they? Maybe they're a little worried, but they're sure that everything will come out fine. You're not so sure."

"It's not me I'm worried about."

"No, it's them, isn't it? And your father and stepmother. You're worried about what will happen to them if you fail. And you're wondering why you have such a burden."

"Exactly. How can you understand?"

"Because I went through something similar. Oh, nowhere near as hard or important as what you want, but..."

"You see, I'm not a very good witch. There are lots of things I can't do. But sometimes when I get angry, things happen without my wanting them to."

"Most kids have that."

"Yes, but most kids grow out of it. As a girl, I learned that I wouldn't grow out of it. So I have to be careful, to not get too excited or mad or scared. That's hard. And I was afraid to get close to people, so I was lonely. Your mother, she only knew about magic from what she saw of me, so she thought we were all like I am, unable to control things, dangerous. Once when I was twelve and home for the summer, she'd stolen my diary. I got so angry that I couldn't do anything. She broke out in warts. They faded after a week, but she never forgot that. That's why she hates magic, and me, and maybe, a little bit, you. And also, if I get too mad, and the magic gets away from me, it could cause me to -burn out. So that I'd never be able to do magic again."

"It must be awful to have something like that."

"You can't control your fate, I can't control my magic. We have things in common."

"But what do I have that makes Lily able to talk to me? She was a heroine, a brave and noble and beautiful woman."

"Lisa, you are brave. Yes, you are! Look at what you've done already! As for beautiful, well, in a year or two, every boy at Hogwarts will be asking you out on dates." I laughed. "Don't worry. You'll be

incredible. And twenty years from now, Binns will be boring new students by talking about you and your friends."

"I hope you're right."

"I am." She turned and left the room. I lay there a bit longer. After a while, I got up, washed my face, and walked into the other room. Everyone looked at me.

"You said we start tomorrow?"

They all grinned at me.

There must have been a hundred boxes full of old, musty photographs and documents, letters, relics, books and files. The adults tried to help out by sorting out what didn't seem important, but there was still a lot to read. Too much to read, actually; we kept forgetting facts that we'd read an hour before. Finally, we arranged for Aunt Ellie to duplicate anything that we thought might be important so we could read it later. Still, going through all that stuff made me feel very inadequate.

"I mean, look at it," I said to Jason late one evening when we were alone. "They had this whole organization, lots of fully trained witches and wizards, including some of the best of their time! And even so they didn't defeat Voldemort. What makes us think we can?"

"We have to try," he said. "What choice do we have?"

"None, I know, but that doesn't make me feel any better," I mumbled. "And here we are, in a very attractive city full of interesting things to do, and we spend our time reading old reports about things Voldemort might have been doing hundreds of years ago!"

"Yes, but somewhere in here there may be a clue to defeating Voldemort. We have to try."

"Have you heard from Phil or Andy?" I asked suddenly.

"Yes, I got a letter a couple days ago. They're having fun -they're at Phil's house now, and they wish we were there."

"So do I," I said. I picked up the next letter and started to read.

"Hold it," Jason said suddenly. "This is interesting."

"What?" I asked, peering at the document he held.

"It's a report on Voldemort."

"So's practically every other paper we've read," I said. "So what?"

"So this one is about Voldemort - I mean, what his weaknesses might be."

"Really? What's it say?"

"It's too badly damaged, I can't read most of it. We'd best find out if Gray or Noxi has any talent at restoring documents." He stood and, carrying the document, left the room. I followed.

The adults were waiting outside. We'd asked them to leave for a while. It was very hard to concentrate with them staring at us. Jason succinctly explained the situation.

"I can probably restore it," Noxi said. "But I'll need you to brew a potion for me, Kev."

"Of course," he said with a smile.

"While you work on that, the kids and I will go and get something to eat," Aunt Ellie said. "What about some ice cream?"

"Great!"

"I like that idea," I added. We followed her up three sets of stairs, out of the museum, and two blocks down the street to a Dairy Queen where we got huge cones. After we finished them, we went back. Dad met us with a smile.

"We've got almost all of the document here. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense to us, but maybe..."

Jason and I looked at the paper.

"The Achilles Project," Jason read from the top.

"They were part of the League Against Voldemort! That was the name assigned to the project to find his weaknesses. This must be one of their reports."

"You're right. But these are odd weaknesses..."

"Love," I read. "Of course, he didn't understand that. How could that be a weapon, though?"

"Hope," Jason said. "That's a tool for us, all right. And it's one that we can always use. Because he causes fear, and wherever there is fear, there is also a bit of hope."

"Friendship." I looked up. "Someone who's never had a friend wouldn't understand what a powerful bond there is among friends. We'll remember that."

"Voldemort never understood friendship, Lily," Jason said. I nodded, and then started.

"What did you say?"

"I said that Voldemort didn't understand friendship."

"No, you called me Lily."

"What? I -I can't remember -why would I say that?"

"I don't know," I said. "But the weirdest thing was, I almost thought it was right for me to be called Lily. I don't understand this." I

looked around me at the adults that I had almost forgotten were still in the room. Aunt Ellie was pale. Noxi looked curious. Gray stood lost in thought, and Dad had concern in his eyes.

"We'd best finish the list," Jason said.

"Yes," I agreed, turning back to it. "Let's see. Selflessness, devotion, courage, pity, and trust. All powerful emotions, all good, things that Voldemort never has and never will understand." _That's why he failed,_ something in me whispered. _He never put anyone in front of himself. He never expected anyone to do so. That's why he couldn't kill Harry, because I sacrificed myself._ No! Something else shouted. _That wasn't me, I never faced Voldemort. That isn't my voice!_ "What's happening?" I whispered to myself. "I can hear her," I said aloud. "In my head, I heard her just then, talking to me." Seeing the blank looks on their faces, I added, "Lily. She was there, just a minute ago." _Are you there?_ I added silently to myself. But there was no answer.

"I am getting very freaked out here," Jason said.

"You can say that again," I agreed, looking at him. "Um, this is all fascinating, but if you don't mind, I'm going to bed now." They nodded their assent. Jason followed me from the room.

In bed, I wondered silently to myself. _What does this mean? What will happen to me? Am I going crazy?_ But before I went to sleep there came a silent feeling to me: one of peace, reassurance. _I won't hurt you_ I heard in my head. And I fell asleep.

Kathryn

The kids weren't the only ones 'freaked out' as they put it, by their odd behavior. After they left, I hurried over to the International Wizarding Library. It was fortunate for me that one of these was here in this city. It was also the second largest wizard library in the world. I started right in on research, using huge, archaic volumes and texts. What I found both worried and fascinated me.

"What on earth have you been doing?" I looked up and saw Kev standing there.

"Research," I said, showing him the notes I'd taken.

"All night?"

"What?" I looked at the nearest window. Sure enough, it was daylight. "That's the problem with these twenty-four-hour libraries, I guess." Kev laughed.

"Come on, we've got to get breakfast."

"Alone?" I asked concernedly.

"Whatever you want."

"Alone, then. I've found put some information that I don't know if the kids should know." He looked puzzled but resisted questioning me until we'd gotten to a restaurant, sat down, and ordered.

"All right, girl, spill it. What did you find that's so horrible?"

"To put it briefly, they may go crazy." I looked at him.

"Let's here the expanded version," he said quietly.

"Well, I found some very rare texts on Manes. Apparently contact such as the kids have with them is not unheard of. Unfortunately, it ends in insanity for the participants about fifty percent of the time."

"I don't like those odds."

"Neither do I, especially as one of the first signs of insanity approaching is that the person can no longer distinguish between himself and the Mane."

"This doesn't sound good."

"I don't know why, or whether anything can be done to prevent it. I'm pretty sure it can't, actually."

"So what do we do?"

"Nothing. We just hope that they don't go mad. Or at least not until after they've saved the world."

"That sounds very callous, Kath."

"I'm feeling despondent. I like these guys; I don't want them to go mad. But that's because they're my friends, now. The fact is, they are going to have to stand between us and Voldemort one of these days. I'd rather they were sane whilst doing so." I bit into my eggs. They tasted like sawdust to me. "Question is, do we tell them?"

"How can we not?"

"What would happen if someone told you you had a fifty percent chance of going insane?"

"I'm not sure," he admitted. "But it's their right to know. We have to tell them."

"But they're just kids."

"Kids, yes. But they are also to some extent people who died a hundred fifty years ago. You weren't the only one to do research last night," he said. "I didn't come across information about insanity, but what there was did seem to indicate that the Manes their -well, hosts is the best word I can think of- are to some small extent the same person. It wasn't very clear, but if they are the same people..."

"All right. We'll tell them."

They took it rather well, I thought. Kev and I told them what I'd found.

"One in two chance?" Jason asked when we were done.

"Yes," I said. I wondered, looking at Lisa, if she might start to cry again, but she didn't. I rather thought that she'd grown up a lot in the last few days.

"We'll beat those odds," she said. "They're better than living though one of Voldemort's attacks, after all. Anyway, we never did care for odds - I mean, they didn't." I was a bit alarmed at this response. The strangeness seemed to be getting worse. It was so hard to find words to explain the concepts I was trying to think of. She smiled weakly at us. I looked at her.

"Can I talk to you privately?" I asked her. She nodded and led the way from the room. Once we were alone, she turned to me.

"What do you want?" The words were rude, but her tone was not. She was just curious.

"How much can you remember of Lily's life?" I asked her.

"Not much," she said, staring at me. "Sometimes I get flashes of memory, or I'll say things that I know must be from her. But as for memory -well, I had a dream last night of holding an infant, and it looked like Harry from the old pictures I've seen. But that could have been my imagination."

"And did this just start yesterday?"

"That's what I thought at first, but then I remembered the way so many of the documents I read had seemed familiar. I had thought it was just dÃ©jÃ vu, but now I wonder." I nodded. "We wrote to Andy and Phil last night, and got their letter this morning. They said they hadn't noticed anything like this, but would tell us if they did."

"It's possible that all these old documents are stirring things up that would normally take longer," I said. "You seem to be taking this well, Lisa."

"I don't know that it's really sunk in yet," she said slowly. "But I do know that every time I've spoken with or felt Lily, I have felt that she wouldn't hurt me. It's very gentle, you see, very soft. Sometimes she worries about me, I think. In a way, she almost thinks of me as her daughter." She spoke with wonder in her voice. "I don't think I have anything to fear from Lily."

"Good," I said. "I don't know what's going to happen, Lisa, but if you need me, you know where I am."

"Thanks," she said with a smile, and walked off.

Lisa

I was a bit shocked about the news, but after a week went by with no further weird incidents or conversations with Lily, I began to relax. Finally, we finished what we were doing in DC.

"We'll go home tomorrow," Dad said.

"Can Phil and Andy come to stay?" Jason asked.

"If their parents allow, sure." Noxi and Gray were going to stay with us too. I think Dad wanted them to help keep an eye on us, to make sure we didn't go crazy without him noticing.

Speaking of noticing, Jason and I had discovered that the professors were obviously in love with each other.

"It's sweet," I said.

"It's crazy," he said. "Look, we know that Voldemort's going to be coming back any time, but here they are planning to get married?"

"Well, if we made life stop just because of Voldemort, he's already won."

"Yes, well, if they get married they won't be able to teach any more."

"That might not be true. Anyway, it's not our worry."

"Just because she's your aunt..."

Even though I still hated the plane trip, I was glad to see home again. It'd been such a long time. First thing, Jason and I grabbed our brooms and played a game of tag. It felt great. Then we helped Dad unload the boxes of papers we'd brought home. But it felt great to relax and be a kid again. I'd had to be an adult a lot in the past few weeks.

Andy and Phil got there three days later. Right off, Jason and I explained to them about what had been happening to us. They still didn't think that anything like that had happened to them, but they were a little nervous.

It was the middle of August when the next weird thing happened. The four of us were out on our brooms playing a game of Quidditch, when Phil looked up. The moon was bright in the evening sky.

"Almost full," he said. "I hate it." We stared at him.

"Phil, are you all right?" Andy asked with concern. But I realized what it was.

"Remus was a werewolf," I said. Phil looked up.

"Oh, my -you mean that that wasn't really me? Or it was, but it was a me that isn't the me I was a few years ago, but was many years ago?"

"Phil, you're just confusing us," Jason said. "That was probably a thought of Remus Lupin's, yes. But I don't think we need to worry too much."

"Yeah? Well, I don't like the idea," Phil said.

"Look, do you think that any of them would hurt us, even to get rid

of Voldemort permanently? Of course not. I think that we're safer with them around than any other way."

"I agree," I said. "They were loyal to each other, at any cost. They'll do the same for us." I looked at Jason, and froze. For a minute, he appeared different, not like the boy I'd know for three years, but like the long dead James Potter. I blinked, and everything was normal. I didn't mention it to the others, either, because something in me held back.

That night, as I looked in the mirror, I had another visual hallucination. I stood there, but it wasn't the me I usually saw. Instead, I was a woman, probably twenty-some years old, with flaming red hair and emerald green eyes. I held a baby in my arms; a baby with black hair and green eyes like mine. Behind me stood a man whose untidy black hair stood at right angles from his head. His arm was around my shoulders, and we were both smiling at the baby, who gurgled and cooed.

I shuddered and blinked. The mirror now showed my own face. Had it been the mirror, I wondered, or my mind playing tricks on me?

Kathryn

I had hoped that one or more of the kids would be in my class where I could keep an eye on them, but that was not the case. I tried to look out for them anyway. Personally, I didn't notice any strange things happening to them, but I was still afraid for them.

"No, I haven't noticed anything I can put a finger on either," Kevin said one evening after dinner. "But they all seem to know too much. If they were any other kid, I'd have thought that they were getting help from another student, that or were really studious. But with them, I can't help thinking this knowledge might not be from the Manes."

"They've been pretty good this year, don't you think?"

"Either well behaved or they've gotten better about not being caught," he said with a laugh. "By the way, would you join me for dinner tomorrow night in Hogsmeade?"

"Certainly," I said, smiling.

The next night he arrived at the Three Broomsticks carrying a cloth-swathed bundle.

"What's that?"

"Take a look." I pulled the cloth off a silver cage. Inside was a magnificent falcon.

"Oh, Kev..."

"I didn't forget your birthday, you know."

"She's beautiful. Thank you." I looked at the gorgeous bird.

Eyrespeech is a very difficult language to learn. Mostly, you're either born with the gift, like I was, or you can't talk to birds. Part of the problem is that all birds speak in slightly different ways. A songbird uses sounds a great deal, while a raptor like a falcon uses mostly body language. The way the feathers are lifted, the tilt of the head, even the gleam of the golden eyes communicates something.

"My, you are a beautiful one," I murmured. "What should I call you?" A direct translation of the bird's reply is impossible, but the gist was:

My name has not been granted me yet. Call me what you wish. Some birds, like the falcon, are granted names to show something about their deeds. Mine had not yet accomplished anything noteworthy enough, it appeared.

"I'll call you Fiona then. Seems like it fits you." Fiona tilted her head.

I approve. I laughed.

"Good." I smiled at Kevin. "She's a perfect gift. Thank you so much."

"You're welcome." He pulled something out of his pocket.

"Another gift?"

"Sort of. I meant to get you one before, but..." he let his words trail off. I opened the small box. Inside was a glittering diamond ring.

"It's beautiful."

"You are beautiful," he said. I could feel myself blushing. He took it from me and put it on my finger. "I know we haven't set a wedding date yet, but I still want everyone to know that we are engaged."

"Don't worry about that. Snape has already spread the news to everyone in the castle. She's trying to get us fired, I think."

"She won't. But when do you want the wedding?" I sighed.

"If I had a choice, I'd say today. But we both know that that's impossible. With Voldemort coming back, we both need to be able to do whatever it takes to defeat him."

"I know. And if we're married, at least one of us will probably have to give up teaching."

"I already said I was willing."

"I know you are willing, Kath, it's just that I think that Voldemort will strike here first. If we're both here, we might be able to stop him."

"Why do you say that he'll come here?"

"Traditionally, almost all of his defeats took place here. I think he'll come here, hoping to erase that by winning a great victory. Also, this is one of the most magical places in the world. If he can win here, it will send a powerful message to people. But most of all, I think that the Manes will bring him. From what I can tell, they seem to know that they are fated to fight him. Perhaps he is equally sure. So I do think he will attack here first."

"Which means we've got to defeat him right off -or we're dead."

"Yes."

I sighed. "Too bad that we can't get rid of the V League. Why can't you convince the Minister of the necessity?" I really knew the answer, but somehow I needed to hear him say it.

"Wood thinks that I'm paranoid about them. They captured me in Africa, you know, a few years back while I was trying to track them down. It was not a pleasant experience. So the Minister thinks that either I'm more afraid of them than I should be or that I want revenge."

"Don't you ever wish that you were a Muggle and didn't have to worry about this stuff?"

"It might be relaxing, but I wouldn't trade this life for anything in the world. Anyway, who'd want to be a Muggle?" I laughed at him.

"No one, of course, which is why they like to pretend that we don't exist."

"Oh, so they're jealous?"

"Right. I couldn't stand to be a Muggle and know, you know. That would be awful. Almost as bad as being a Squib." I shuddered at the thought of knowing about magic and never being able to do it. _Maybe that's one reason why Grace was always so bitter,_ I thought suddenly.

"Well, it's getting late. We'd best get back to the castle."

Lisa

It came to me one day while I was sitting in Charms; a feeling of dread so overpowering that I screamed. The room seemed to whirl.

"It is coming, Lisa!" Lily's voice screamed in my ears. Everything went dark.

When I opened my eyes I was in the hospital wing. Dr. Sarisal was there, and she looked up as I came round.

"Good," she said. "You'll be fine, dear."

"What happened?"

"You fainted. I hope nobody tried to play a nasty trick on you?" No? Well, it may just have been a passing thing, but I'm keeping you here overnight."

"I'm fine."

"Sure you are, deary. No, lie still." She walked over to the door and opened it.

"Ten minutes, no more, you hear?" Andy, Phil and Jason came bounding into the room.

"Are you all right?" Jason asked with concern.

"I'm fine now." I shot a glance at Sarisal, who was out of earshot. I told them, in a whisper, what had happened.

"It must be about Voldemort," Phil said. "What else could it be?"

"I don't know. Any of you have anything like this happen to you?" They all said no. Then Sarisal hustled over and made them leave.

The next day, she let me out around noon.

"It's no use looking for your friends," she told me. "They went to the village already." I wandered around, feeling despondent. Hogsmeade trips were rare enough that missing one was a big disappointment. Somehow, I wandered up to the teachers' quarters.

"Lisa?" It was Noxi. "Come in here a minute." She sat me down and gave me a cup of tea. Then she fixed me with a glare sharper than that of her falcon.

"I was told that you screamed and fainted yesterday. Does it have anything to do with Lily?"

"Yes," I said. "I'm not worried, though. She was just warning me. None of the boys have had anything like this happen."

"Are they sure?"

"Trust me, they're sure. It's hard not to be."

"All right then. Do you sense Lily, ever?"

"Yes." I looked at her. "I can feel her, definitely. She's part of me, and I'm part of her. I'm not sure what I'll do when she is gone."

"Gone?"

"They'll go after Voldemort is dead."

"You seem very certain that he'll die. What if it's you who dies?"

"I'm not very afraid, not really. I've been through it once, you know." I looked at her shocked face. "Oh, that was Lily, wasn't it? Usually I'm -we're- better at not doing that sort of thing, but I'm relaxed here and wasn't paying attention. It just sort of slipped out."

"If I wanted to talk to the Lily part of you, could I?"

"Certainly. Do you want to?"

"Yes, I think so."

"I'm here." She looked at me.

"Lily," she said slowly, "I've heard a lot about you."

"Don't believe everything you hear."

"I don't. I don't believe, though, that you'd want to hurt Lisa."

"Of course not. That would be hurting me too."

"But there is a chance that she might be harmed?"

"A chance, though it's slim. We both know it. There's more danger from Voldemort."

"Can you speak to anyone else in the wherever you are?"

"No, it's only through Lisa that I can see or hear anything at all, now. It used to be that I could see your world vaguely, but now it's brighter. It's almost like being alive again."

"What of when you have to go?" A musical peal of laughter came from my throat, but it wasn't mine.

"It will be a relief. It's been a long time, this half-life. I'll be glad to go." A sigh followed her words. "I know that I will go, one way or the other, within the next five years."

"One way or the other?"

"Either Voldemort's death will release me, or I will finally perish because -he won."

"I see. You know this for sure?"

"Some things, I can see in the future, as if through a thick veil. That's one thing I have seen."

"Anything else?"

"Not much. There is pain and sorrow ahead along many paths, but on others joy and happiness follow."

"I see. You see many futures?"

"Until one is the present, all are possible. Maybe all of them happen."

"Let's not get there. I know that stuff isn't fun to think about."

"As you wish." Suddenly, she was gone. "Um, it's me again. I don't know where she went."

"I see. You could hear that?"

"Sure. I was here, I just wasn't in control."

"Not in control of your own body." Noxi shivered. "That's a strange thought."

Interlude

The Dark Lord's face was veiled. His servant could not tell his thoughts.

"You are certain of what you say?"

"Positive."

"So my old foes are dead, but not gone." He turned to the spy. "Keep a close eye on them."

"I already am."

"Do not fail me."

"Never, my lord."

"No one suspects me?"

"No one." The hooded figure smiled. "Who would? They are sure that I am on their side."

"Be wary around these -children." Voldemort spat the last word in disgust. "They are insignificant fools alone, but with the help of these spirits, they could be dangerous."

"I will insinuate myself further into your enemies' confidences. Already, I know most of their plans. I will prove my usefulness to you."

"If you succeed, I shall be most generous. But if you fail, the pain you suffered before will seem but a pleasant memory."

The hooded figure shivered and bowed.

"I will not fail you."

"Good. Now, as to my plan. These enemies of mine may be in part old opponents, but they are also children, and children are easily frightened. You will frighten them."

"How, my lord?"

"By trying to kill them. You will not succeed, of course, but that will make them nervous."

"But surely they will realize that there is a spy in their midst?"

"Have a suspect ready to drag before them. You are clever, or so you say. You will think of something."

"As you command, my lord."

Lisa

It was a bright, sunny October morning, and Phil, Andy, Jason and I were strolling through Hogsmeade. This was the second Hogsmeade weekend of the term, and the first that I had been able to go on. I had wanted to see everything, and so we'd run about for an hour, looking at all the sites. Now we approached the Three Broomsticks for lunch.

It seemed that every students and teacher who could make it was here. I saw Noxi and Gray strolling together, arm in arm. Snape and the Headmistress were having an animated discussion. McGonagall turned and walked away as we approached. Snape sniffed and went about her business. Ari Malfoy glowered at us from the door of Honeydukes. We ignored him and entered the inn.

It was dark inside, and crowded. I looked about as my eyes grew accustomed to the dim light and saw-

"Dad!" There they were, Dad and Aunt Ellie. They were seated together and appeared to be waiting for us. They even had four mugs of butterbeer waiting.

"Mom, what are you doing here?" Jason was just as puzzled as I.

"We had business, dear, and then as it was a Hogsmeade weekend for you, we decided to wait here for you to show up." She smiled. "We knew you'd come here sooner or later." I was looking at her closely. There was something a bit peculiar about her, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it.

"Mum, are you okay?" Jason looked at her. "You look tired."

"Oh, I'm fine. It's just that," she glanced at Dad. He nodded and she turned back to us. "I'm pregnant. You two are going to have a brother or sister." I looked at Jason. I guess he looked as astonished as I felt.

"Oh, that's great," I managed finally. "When will it be?"

"June," Dad said. "Probably just before school gets out."

"Ah," I said. "Well, Jason, I have some experience with younger siblings. I'll tell you what you need to know."

"Actually, I will," Andy said. "I've got six, you know, and more on the way all the time. You've got lots to learn, bud." We sat down at the table.

"So, how is everything?" Dad asked. He seemed nonchalant, but we all knew what he was really asking. Jason looked around before answering.

"Fine for now. It doesn't seem like he'll be arriving soon, if that's what you mean."

"I really wanted to know how all of you are handling," Dad said.

"We're fine, Dad, really," I assured him. "I promise, we're not -well, we're fine." Saying that you aren't going insane in a tavern is not the smartest thing to do. "Anyway, Gray and Noxi are keeping tabs on us. They'll let you know if anything odd happens." Dad was about to say something when loud noises began outside. We jumped from our chairs and ran to look. Aunt Ellie and Dad were at the door almost before we were. I noticed that both of them had their wands already drawn.

Bright balls of light were flying up and down the street. People were running and screaming in terror. Others were huddled in doorways. In that brief, confused minute, I saw Snape, McGonagall, Gray and Noxi, all with drawn wands, huddled into four separate doorways. I didn't have a chance to look at them too long, though, because the balls were not only getting wilder, but also heading straight for us.

"Run!" Andy yelled, and we all took his advice. I saw Dad pulling Aunt Ellie back inside and the two of them ducking behind the bar as I pelted off down the street. I glanced back. One of the balls was following me. I ran faster. It was gaining. I tried to think of something to do, but couldn't. It was getting closer, and closer. I closed my eyes and waited for the end.

It didn't come. Instead, I felt myself being pulled by my arm. My feet left the ground, and I opened my eyes. Jason was holding my arm with one hand. The other he was using to steer a broom. I managed to get astride it, ahead of him.

"Where'd you get this?" I gasped.

"The Chasers were trying some fancy moves down the street. Emerald had just dismounted, and so I grabbed this and took off. Had to get away from the one that was after me, and then I saw that you were in trouble.

"Thanks," I said. "I didn't know you could fly that well."

"I can't," he said. "But James was an excellent Quidditch player. He sort of took over and did what had to be done."

"Well, thanks to you both," I said. "What about Phil and Andy?"

"They were fine when I grabbed you, and just after I did all the balls vanished. It's probably safe to go down now." I looked at the village a hundred feet below. There were no balls of wild light any more.

"You saved my life," I said.

"You don't know that."

"Yes, I do," I said. I kissed him, briefly. "Thank you. We'd best get down before they get worried."

"Um, yeah," he said, and thirty seconds later we were on the ground. It was a scene of confusion. No one seemed to have been hurt, though.

"The balls," Andy said as he and Phil joined us. "They were chasing us."

"You're paranoid," Jason said.

"No, I'm not."

"He's right," came a voice. "What I want to know is, why?" The headmistress approached. _What are we going to say?_ I thought. Then, the answer came to me.

"I wouldn't like to say, professor, but it might possibly have been a prank that got kind of out of hand." The boys nodded vigorously.

"Would you have any idea who pulled this prank?" she asked. We all shook our heads no, but each of us let our eyes dart briefly to where Ari Malfoy stood.

"I see," she said. "Well, if you're all right." She strode off.

"Good thinking," Phil said. "I wasn't sure how we'd explain that."

"That was no childish prank," a cold voice said. "That was highly advanced Dark Magic." Professor Miranda Snape stood glaring at us.

"Dark magic? Who on earth would be using dark magic here?" Professor Gray had joined the party.

"That's your job to know, Gray," she spat. "Sounds like we have a problem for you, don't you think?" And then she, too, strode away.

"She's right, though," Gray said, staring after her. "That was Dark Magic. Somebody must know about you four, and is trying to kill you. Someone here is a spy." He wore a curious expression. I wasn't sure what it meant, but it just didn't seem like the right expression for the time. Suddenly, I remembered how he had looked when I had glimpsed him in the attack. He'd had a similar expression. Instead of fear, or terror, he had looked -how? Intrigued? Curious? Puzzled? Or -could it be -amused?

Later, back at the castle, I told the boys what I thought I had seen.

"Ridiculous," Andy scoffed. "He's on our side, there's no way he's a spy. I'm betting that it's Snape."

"No, I don't think that it's her," Phil said slowly. "If she were, I

think she'd do a better job of disguising her hate for us. It might be Noxi."

"I don't think so," I said scornfully. "I trust her. Lily trusts her. Besides, she looked terrified during the attack."

"Maybe she's a good actor," Andy put in.

"Who else might it have been?" Jason wondered aloud.

"Anyone in Hogsmeade," I said. "Most of the teachers were there, and most of the students."

"Look, I wouldn't put it past Malfoy to be spying, but I don't think any of the students here have the ability to do something like that," Phil said.

"Dark Magic that Voldemort himself taught them," Andy suggested. "It's possible."

"Look, let's be paranoid here, and say that everyone except the four of us is a suspect," Jason said.

"Including your parents?" Andy looked at us. "They were there."

"And they both had their wands out," Phil put in. "Were any of you looking at them just as the noise started?"

"The moment that it started, I had just turned toward Dad," I said. "Before that, we were looking at each other, mostly." I frowned. "But it couldn't be them. It just couldn't be!"

"Everyone is a suspect," Jason said firmly. "Now we need evidence. Until we know who to trust, don't tell anyone anything."

"Right," I said.

The next afternoon, I got a note from Noxi, asking me to have tea with her, alone. I sent back that I'd be glad to. I'd been wanting to talk to her, because no matter what the boys said, I didn't think that she could be the spy. That wasn't the only thing I wanted to talk to her about, though.

"Kev tells me that you guys seem to think that the attack was aimed at you," she said as we drank tea together.

"Yeah, we do. I guess someone here must be working for Voldemort."

"Do you know who it might be?"

"No. We're not ruling anyone out. Everyone except the four of us is a suspect."

"Even Kev and me, I suppose?"

"Yes. They don't want to make the same mistake again."

"What mistake?"

"That someone isn't a spy who really is. They didn't suspect Pettigrew, you know." She shivered a little. I think she had a problem still reconciling the idea that we were kids but were also long-dead heroes. Frankly, I had trouble with that idea. "I don't think you're the spy, personally."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," she said. "I suppose you won't tell me anything else, though."

"No, I can't. There was something I wanted to talk to you about, though," I said. I hesitated.

"What is it?"

"Well," I began, trying to find words, "How -how do you know if you're in love?" She looked at me for a moment, and then looked away.

"There are many different ways, dear. Everyone is right about something. It is wonderful, you know -it's the grandest feeling in the world, to love someone and have him love you. But it can hurt, sometimes, too. If the person you love doesn't love you, or if you can't be with him, that's hard. It's often confusing - you don't know how you feel; one minute you're queen of the universe, the next you feel like dying." I nodded. "Are you in love with someone?"

"I don't know," I said, looking at the floor. "I'm a little young, don't you think?"

"You're more than thirteen. Love doesn't require a minimum age, you know. I don't know if you're too young or not. I don't think that I was, at your age."

"It's not just that," I forced myself to say. "I think I love someone, but I can't be sure that it's really me who loves him."

"And not Lily?" she asked gently. "Are you - do you think you are in love with Jason?"

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe I am, but maybe that's Lily. She loves James very much, even now, and if Jason is James in some way, her emotions could be influencing my own."

"Love is never a very rational thing," Kathryn said musingly. "People fall in love for strange reasons. You may not be too young to fall in love, Lisa, but you are too young to deal with it the way adults do. You know that even if you do love him, you'll have to wait years."

"I know," I said. "Anyway, that's not really important, is it? We have to fight Voldemort soon, and we might not even survive. So the whole question would be moot, right?"

"Maybe," she answered. "But I have a feeling we'll all survive."

"You don't have to face him," I said.

"I do," she replied. "I will face him, because I'd rather die than give in to him. And I'm not going to let children face him alone, even if you are heroes in disguise." I laughed.

"Thanks for talking to me," I said.

"Anytime, Lisa," she said. Just then, there was a rapping on the window. "Oh, Fiona wants to come in."

"I'll get it," I said. "I haven't met her yet."

"She's a bit shy," Kathryn warned as I opened the window and the falcon fell in. She perched herself on Kathryn's shoulder and preened happily.

"This is Lisa," Kathryn said, turning so the bird could see me. She blinked slowly with her great golden eyes. "She likes you."

"Really?"

"Yes. That's what she tells me. Falcons don't lie, although blue jays are awful that way, and you should hear sparrows' gossip! Falcons and other raptors are a bit more refined, though, and extremely loyal."

"She is gorgeous," I said.

"Almost every living thing is, in its own way."

"I have to go now," I said regretfully, for dusk was falling outside and I knew that the boys would be wondering what was taking me so long.

"I'll see you soon," she said, and let me out.

Kathryn

After Lisa had gone, I turned back to Fiona.

Who was that that you treat like your own fledgling? She asked.

"Lisa is my shell-sister's fledgling," I said. In falcon terms, shell-brother or sister means what we would call a sibling, while flight-sister would be a close friend. "You returned early today."

I had a reason, flight-sister.

"What reason, my friend?"

Your mate asks for you.

"He isn't my mate yet," I said. "And how could he ask you?"

You know I know some human-speech, she said. _And I do not at all understand how your customs work. You and he fly like the winds will never die, yet I cannot understand you. Sometimes you act as if you were already mates, sometimes just like flight-brothers._

"That's the human way," I said.

Indeed. He was very polite in asking me.

"Come with me, then," I said. "You can fly more after I see him."

Where did your sister-fledgling go? Fiona asked.

"To join her flight-brothers. They are worried."

Why? Are they not Those Who Command the Winds?

"What did you call them?"

Do you not know of them? I thought that surely a human like you would know.

"Is that how you call wizards?"

You mean Fire-Bearers? No. Those Who Command the Winds are a legend that we know is true, that once, a evil Fire-Bearer tried to kill them, but did not succeed, so their spirits soar upon the winds until he is grounded forever.

"It seems I have much to learn of your people," I said. How could a bird, even such a wise bird as Fiona, know such things? I was determined to get to the bottom of this sooner or later. "Anyway, they're worried about a -how would you say it? A spy, um, One Who Would Betray a Shell-Brother's Nest."

Such a one is here? There was rage in her eyes now.

"We think so. I don't know who."

I will ask the sky-brothers to help watch over your shell-fledgling and her flight-brothers. It would not do to have Those Who Command the Winds destroyed before their time.

"Thank you, flight-sister," I said. I would have said more, but we had just entered the entrance hall and it was full of people. There were some glances at Fiona, but most of the students and teachers knew about her by now. I strode out of the door.

He is near the Quidditch pitch, Fiona threw in helpfully.

"How is it, girl, that you can say 'Quidditch' but not 'wizard'? Oh, no, I don't want an answer."

"Kath! I'm glad to see that Fiona understood me."

"She understood your message and said you were 'very polite'."

"High praise from such a noble bird," he said, and bowed his head a bit in her direction. She stared at him solemnly. "What did she say?"

I laughed. "She says that you are polite too, and called you

'flight-brother'. That's very high praise. She likes you." I looked at him. "Have I thanked you for getting her for me?"

"A thousand times," he said with a laugh. "I am glad you like her."

"So, why did you want to see me?" I asked.

"Many reasons," he said, and I laughed at the grin on his face, "but chiefly because I spoke to our young friends. They're rather suspicious of me."

"They suspect everyone. Lisa said so."

"I do think that they're a bit more suspicious of me. It does make sense; after all, I am supposed to know a lot about dark magic. There aren't many steps from knowing about it to knowing it."

"Oh, darling, they don't know you as well as I do, or they'd never suspect you," I said, throwing my arms around his neck. "By the way, Fiona is most confused by our behavior. Apparently falcons would view it as unnecessarily complicated."

"That's one good reason why I'm not a falcon," he said. "Another is that no matter how beautiful Fiona may be, her owner is a thousand times more lovely."

"Do you love me?"

"You know I do, Kath."

"I just want to hear you say it again."

"Kath, I love you as much as I possibly can. I love you more than I love life itself, and I'll die on your grave if you die first." He affected a melodramatic voice.

"You'll do no such thing," I said. "If for some reason I should die first, I expect you to live out your days and do no such stupid thing. If you don't I'll haunt you."

"How can you haunt me if I'm dead?"

"I'll find a way."

"I believe you, so I hope that we die together after a long and happy life."

"And are turned into a pair of trees for all eternity?"

"There are worse things to become."

"True..." Just then, Fiona landed on my shoulder. She'd apparently eaten a few moments before, and her talons still had blood on them.

"Fiona dear, I love you, but you really are a messy eater," I said.

I am a falcon. I'm supposed to eat like this.

"Hmmpf." I said with a chuckle, and carried her back inside.

Interlude

"The children are frightened, my lord, but they are suspicious."

"I knew that they would be. Do they suspect you?"

"I do not know. I believe that they suspect everyone."

"Wise of them. Perhaps more of my old enemies linger in them than I thought."

"My lord, they are but children. If I tried, I could kill them."

"Do not be so sure of that. Children are not as helpless as they seem sometimes." The evil one almost seemed to shutter, but surely such a one as he would never give in to such weakness. "And even if you did kill them, it might not stop them. I shall deal with them as soon as I regain my powers. And that will be very soon."

"I pray that it is so, my lord."

"Do you tire of your role?"

"I must say that it is wearisome. Such pretending I must do, and such things I must say! I do not much care for children, my lord."

"And yet I make you surround yourself with hundreds of them. What a pity. We must all suffer some things if we do not wish to suffer worse."

"Yes, my lord."

"Remember that."

"I will, my lord."

"And you will do nothing without my command. Tell me, what do you know of rumors that many birds have come to Hogwarts?"

"They are true, my lord. I believe it is the fault of the woman, Noxi."

"Yes, she is an Eyre-Speaker, is she not?"

"Yes, my lord."

"A foolish gift, conversing with birds. Reptiles, now... But you think she commands this legion?"

"Her falcon, perhaps."

"Another foolish gift."

"It distracts her, my lord. Perhaps I should kill her?"

"You are very violent tonight. No, leave her alive for now. She could be dangerous. But never fear, I shall deal with her in time."

"I look forward to the day when all your plans are fulfilled, my lord."

4. The Last Battle

> <meta name="ProgId"> Chapter 11

_Lisa _

"Good grief! It's a penguin!"

"Where?" I looked to where Andy pointed. "All right, now it's gotten ridiculous. I admit, these birds that have been everywhere the past month have been interesting, but penguins do not live in the UK. And certainly not at Hogwarts." I looked around. "Hey -here comes Noxi."

"You stay and talk to her," Andy said. "Phil and I have plans." And, laughing mischievously, he ran off.

"Hello," Kathryn smiled at me as she got near.

"Hi," I said. "Why is there a penguin here?"

"A penguin?" She blinked, then looked around. "Oh, there is," she said, laughing. "Let's see. She squatted down by it and engaged in a low conversation. Then she smiled, straightened, and turned to me. "He's in charge of provisions for the Great Bird Convention tomorrow. They're holding it here."

"The Great Bird Convention?"

"They have them every ten years or so. All different birds come, and during the convention nobody is allowed to eat anybody else."

"So, why are they holding it here?"

"Because they're here already."

"Why?" I asked. "I mean, you can talk to them. Why are all these birds here?" She looked at me and frowned seriously.

"They're concerned about you four. Apparently, they know about you somehow. It's hard to know exactly, but it's possible that they have some prophecy concerning you. They'll do whatever it takes to protect you, and to keep an eye out for the spy."

"What if some of the birds are working for Voldemort?"

"It's possible, but if so, they won't be at this convention. From what I understand, if other birds found out, they'd rip the offender apart, convention or not."

"I see." I looked up at Fiona, who had perched on Kathryn's shoulder. "Will Fiona be at the convention?"

"Yes. She'll be representing the Hogwarts birds -the owls ganged up on her and elected her."

"That's funny. Does anyone else know about the birds?"

"Well, anyone with eyes in his head can see that something strange is going on," she said dryly, "but I haven't told anyone, if that's what you're asking."

"No one?"

"I mentioned it to Kev, I think, but no one else."

"All right," I said. "I'd better go now. We've got a test in Potions tomorrow."

"I am just sure that Gray is the spy," Andy said, pacing back and forth. "He's got to be!"

"Look, your record on identifying spies isn't that great," Phil remarked. "You thought I was the spy the first time around, remember, Padfoot?"

"I admit I was wrong there," he said, "but you've got to admit, there are some suspicious things about him. I say we should keep an eye on him."

"Fine," Jason said. "Now, we were talking about the plans for tonight. Phil, you're out. That cough of yours might give us away."

"Fine," Phil grumbled. "I'll do my best to look surprised when they drag you in with detentions." We were going outside tonight, to practice a difficult spell the Manes had taught us. If we did it right, it would give us valuable information about Voldemort. It might even reveal who the spy was.

At a quarter to midnight, I slipped down to the Common Room. Andy and Jason were already there. We covered ourselves in the Cloak and left Gryffindor Tower.

Halfway to the door, we had to stop and press ourselves against the wall. Professor Snape was gliding through the corridors like a manta across the ocean floor. She looked angry and in a hurry. We waited five minutes before going the rest of the way to the door and out into the night.

It was a very dark night; the moon was almost full but there were many clouds. Once we were a long way from the castle, Jason pulled out his wand. He was about to light it when

"There!" I hissed. "Someone's creeping toward the Forbidden Forest! Look!" A shadowy figure, tall and robed, was headed for the forest.

"Should we follow?" Andy asked.

"Definitely," Jason declared. "That might be the spy!" We headed after the figure. Suddenly, a dark shape swooped overhead.

"It's one of those blasted birds," Andy muttered. I watched it fly off and settle down on a perch. Except it wasn't a perch, for the shape moved. I knew then who this second person must be.

"That was Fiona!" I said. "Noxi's back there! Freeze!" We stood perfectly still as she passed.

"That was close," Andy said once we dared to breathe. "Honestly, it's ridiculous! How many people are sneaking around tonight, anyway?" We continued in the path that the two people ahead of us had trod.

Well, we thought we did, but it was so dark. Finally, as we stood in a large clearing, we knew we were lost.

"Lumos," Jason muttered, and Andy and I followed suit. "Great. We've got to find a way back -what was that?" A noise had started. It sounded like something large, moving closer to us. We stared around, trying to see what it was. I felt very frightened. Suddenly-> "Look out!" Andy screamed. A seven-foot troll had burst into the clearing. My mind was telling me that it wasn't large, for a troll, while another part said that it was quite large enough, thank you. A third part of me wanted to run, but I was too terrified. I stood there, frozen, as it came closer. Jason tugged at my arm, but I couldn't move. <o:p><o:p>

"How can we get rid of a troll?" Andy was saying frantically. "We're gonna die, Voldemort isn't even here and we're going to die." Something in me snapped at those words. I raised my wand and shouted something. A jet of light flew out and hit the troll. He doubled up with pain.

"What was that?" I muttered to myself. "Ah. Thanks, Lily." I ran toward the edge of the clearing. But now the troll was coming toward us again. Trolls are much faster than you'd think. I ran, but I looked back at the troll and my foot was caught between two roots. I twisted my ankle, and fell to the ground, moaning in pain. Instantly, Jason and Andy were there. They looked at the troll, coming very close.

"Go!" I yelled. "Go on!"

"No!" Jason launched himself at the troll, Andy seconds behind. I had a perfect view. In mid-air, they seemed to shimmer, to change. And suddenly, it wasn't two boys who were attacking the troll any more. It was a huge black dog and a great stag.

So Padfoot and Prongs are back, Lily said from inside me. They couldn't have picked a better time, I replied. The attack drove the troll back. He turned and ran. The boys chased him a bit, then returned to the clearing. They shimmered again, and Andy and Jason stood in the clearing. They bent down and picked up their dropped wands.

"Well," Andy said after a minute. "That was weird."

"Could you do it again?" I asked, curious.

"You bet," Jason said. "I know exactly how to do it." He walked over and helped me get to my feet. I winced in pain.

"I can't walk."

"I'll carry you."

"You'll never make it. I'm too heavy."

"No, you aren't," he said, and suddenly the stag stood again in the clearing. Andy helped me mount. It wasn't at all like riding a horse; I had to cling to his neck to hold on. Andy stood back.

"I'm going to keep an eye out for dangers." He became the great dog and trotted ahead.

It was slow going, but we made the castle just as the first light of false dawn began to shine. Then we stopped and pulled the Cloak on. Jason and Andy supported me and we carefully made our way back to the common room. We collapsed into armchairs, exhausted.

Thirty seconds later, the door to the girls' dorm burst open.

"Up already? Wow, that's early." A bunch of second years came pouring into the room. "Want to play cards before breakfast?"

It took all my willpower not to blast them there.

_Kathryn _

I watched Lisa run off to find her friends, and then turned back to the penguin.

"Have you noticed anything strange going on?"

_How so, Madame? _

"Spies, dark magic, strange creatures. Anything, really."

_I am afraid not. However, if I do, I shall most assuredly tell you.
_

"Thanks. Do you have a name?"

_I am called Asking-topral, but I prefer Mario. _

"What?"

_The name of one of the greatest penguins of all time. _

"Fine, I'll call you Mario." I turned back toward the castle. "If you can't reach me, tell Fiona, and I'll be sure to hear it."

I shall do so. I headed back inside.

That night, I was preparing for bed, when Fiona flew in the open window.

"Good evening," I said pleasantly. She perched herself and looked at me.

Someone goes to the forest, she said.

"Who?" I stared out the window, but could not see anyone.

_You must follow. _

"I don't know why you won't tell me, but..." I picked up my cloak and hurried from the room, down the many flights of stairs, and outside. Fiona flew on ahead and swooped back to rest on my shoulder.

This way, she said. I hurried through the forest, following whoever it was. Finally, I reached a clearing. The figure was standing in the middle of it, staring at the sky. I pulled my wand out, and stepped forward.

"Lumos," I said, and raised my wand. Kevin stood in the clearing. He blinked as the light hit him.

"Kath? What are you doing here?"

"I might ask the same of you," I said evenly. He stared around himself.

"I don't know," he said.

"You don't know?" I repeated flatly.

"I don't." He looked at me and began to speak wildly. "I know it sounds ridiculous, but believe me! I don't know why I'm here, I don't remember getting here - I don't remember anything after I finished grading papers." I stared at him. If he was telling the truth, the spy had to be powerful enough to do something like that to him. If he was lying, then either he had a reason for being out here that he couldn't tell me, or he was the spy. I shivered. He couldn't be the spy, he just couldn't.

"I think we'd best go back now," I said. He nodded and we walked back together.

Later, alone in my room, I thought about things. Surely, he couldn't be the spy? Why? Because you love him? Bad reason, Kath. He could be the spy. He did have connections with the V League, and he did know a lot about dark magic. But I had known him since I was a kid. And I loved him. I didn't want him to be the spy.

"Fiona, you and I are going to find out who the spy really is," I said. "And no matter who he -or she - is, we'll tell whoever we can. Even if it's Kevin." And how horrible that would be for me if it were true. In love with a spy for Voldemort. Fates don't get much worse than that.

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Interlude

"So, do you think she believes what you wish her to?"

"I do not know, my lord. Noxi is a very clever woman. It is difficult to deceive her. Her bird spies for her, too."

"Troublesome thing. Well, you must continue to follow my

instructions."

"I will. May I kill the bird?"

"No. That will not help."

"Yes, my lord."

"Soon, the whole world will be mine." The dark figure began to laugh, high and cold and cruel. He sounded quite insane.

--

Lisa

In January it got very cold. In fact, it was the coldest winter anyone could remember. The lake froze over. Mario the penguin brought some of his brothers, and during the day you could see them playing weird penguin games on the ice. Most of the birds left; it was just too cold for them. Nobody went outside unless it was an emergency; the Hogsmeade weekends were canceled until the weather changed. Quidditch practices and matches were off, too. Almost everyone was in the common room by eight o'clock, these days, and most didn't go to bed until after midnight. So between the cold and the crowd, it was impossible for us to get outside to try the spell again.

Phil had been very surprised when we told him what had happened. "I just hope I don't turn into a werewolf," he said anxiously. But the full moon passed and he had been fine.

The boys were now doubly suspicious of Noxi. They were convinced that she and Gray were working together, spying for Voldemort. I didn't really know what to think. I was sure that Kathryn was innocent, but of Gray I was not sure. He seemed to love her, but that might be a clever act. Surely, a spy for Voldemort could act well, right? But we studied them and waited for an opportunity to learn more to present itself.

Our chance came in March. The weather finally warmed up a little, and outside classes were resumed. To make up for lost time, the classes were made longer, so they shoved two or more houses together. That's why we were in Care of Magical Creatures with the Slytherins. We were working together, learning how to care for pegasi, when we overheard Malfoy talking to Zabini.

"...Sure there's a spy. Dad says that" His voice was almost inaudible, but we all heard that one bit. That was enough.

"He must know something," Andy declared that evening. "We'll have to find out what."

"How?" I asked prosaically.

"A spell, a potion, something."

"Wait a minute," said Phil, staring off into space. "A potion. I think I can remember how you're supposed to make the Truthsayer potion."

"That's illegal," Jason said. "It has been for the past fifty years."

And with good reason. The Truthsayer potion causes the person who drinks it to tell the person who fed it to him anything that person wants to know, for the period of one hour. And then, the potion wipes the memory of the victim, so he doesn't know he's said it. It was a bit like the Imperius curse, except that it wore off quickly and the victim had no memory of it being used. And it did not carry a life sentence in Azkaban, but I could just see the questions we'd be asked if we were caught using such a thing.

"I know it's illegal," Phil said irritably, "But I saw the recipe a few times when I was looking through old potion books, to try to brew the Wolfsbane potion. Of course, I never succeeded, but I know the recipe for the Truthsayer potion." He grabbed a piece of parchment and dashed off a list. I looked at it.

"Unicorn hair, snakeskin, typical stuff - wait a minute! Powdered essence of keracil? Thiotimoline? Hens' teeth? Where are we supposed to get this stuff?"

"We'll have to find it somehow," Jason said. "Because this is our best hope."

"Why don't we ask Kathryn to get it for us?" Andy asked reasonably. "I mean, if she isn't the spy, she'll think we need it because of something the Manes said. And if she is the spy, well, she won't know what's going on, and we won't tell her."

"Great idea," Phil said.

"It's worth a try," Jason commented.

"You're all nuts," I said. "But I haven't got any better idea. Let's go."

It was late May before the potion was ready. Well, we thought it was ready. We still didn't know if it would work properly, and had decided to test it out before using it on Malfoy. I had volunteered to take the potion. I sat down in the empty room we'd been using, picked up the glass, and began to raise it to my face.

blink

I looked around. I was lying down now, and the glass stood empty by my feet. The boys grinned at me.

"Do you remember anything?"

"No, I don't even remember drinking it," I said.

"Great! It works perfectly. Let's go try it on Ari." I looked at the potion. There seemed to be about two doses left.

"Wait," I said. They looked at me. "I think I've got a better idea."

Twenty minutes later, we stood in Noxi's office. She looked up.

"What is it?"

"Please, just drink this," I said, handing her the cup. She took it, looked at us, shrugged, and drank. Her eyes rolled up in their sockets and she went a bit limp.

"Are you the spy?" Jason asked. "Are you working for Voldemort?"

"No," she said. Her voice sounded far off and distant. We looked at each other excitedly. This was paying off just as we had hoped. We knew we'd be able to trust her.

"Do you know who the spy is?" Andy asked.

"No."

"Do you have any suspicions?" I asked.

"I think it might be - Kev," she said. The words seemed to have to be dragged from her. "I hope not."

"Why?" Jason asked curiously. The potion, of course, made her answer.

"Because I love him, and could not stand to be in love with someone who is working for Voldemort." We fell silent then. After a while, she looked up.

"What happened?"

"Come with us, please," Jason said. He led the way, holding the other cup, down to Gray's office. No one spoke. The procession had an air of a funeral march. We pushed the door open. He sat, alone, at his desk. As we came in, he looked up.

"What is it?" he smiled. Jason held out the cup.

"Drink this," he said. Gray looked at us, then at Kathryn. He took the cup and drank, going through a copy of what Kathryn had done before him.

"Can you hear me?" Jason asked.

"Yes."

"Then tell me. Are you spying for Voldemort?" We all held our breath, waiting for an answer.

—

Kathryn

"Are you spying for Voldemort?" Jason had asked. The moment between the question and answer was the longest of my life. Everything seemed to be in slow motion. Part of me realized that whatever potion the kids had, it must be a truth drug. I had taken it, not knowing what it was, because I trusted them implicitly. Kev had taken it -why? Because he trusted them? Because he didn't know what it was? He opened his mouth, and all other thoughts fell from my mind.

"No," he said. A small noise escaped me. I was so relieved, so happy

to know finally that he was not a spy. At the same time, I was ashamed for even suspecting him. Andy looked a bit crestfallen.

"I was so sure," he said.

"I wasn't really," Phil said. "But things were a bit suspicious."

"So, why were you in the Forbidden Forest that time?" I asked.

"Was that you guys that we almost ran into?" Lisa asked. "I knew you were there, Kath, because I saw Fiona. But I didn't know he was there."

"You were there too?" I asked, distracted. "Where?"

"Oh, we were under the cloak. We came back after a run-in with a troll."

"A troll? I'll have to hear the whole story soon. Hold it, why were you there?" I turned back to Kev.

"I don't know," he said. "Someone must have enchanted me."

"Who?"

"I don't know."

"Whoever it was was the spy," Andy declared.

"Fine, look, go on now. I'll come and talk to you in a little bit," I said. "When will this wear off?"

"About half an hour," Jason said, checking his watch. "We'll be around." They left. I stared at Kev. There were so many thoughts in my mind. For some reason, I kept remembering one particular night, long ago, when I had been only eleven years old and unaware of magic...

_It was late that spring night that I heard the doorbell ring. Actually, I had been on my way to bed, but I opened the door now to see who was there. _

_"Kev!" I said, surprised. He wore a somber expression. _

_"I need to talk to you," he said. _

_"Now really isn't a good time," I began. "How about tomorrow?"
_

_"No, I have to talk to you now." I hesitated. _

_"All right." I slipped out the door into the front garden. "What is it?" _

_"Kath, I came here to tell you that we -my family and I - we're moving. Tonight. We're leaving and not coming back." _

_"Why?" was all I could manage. _

_"Dad's job, mum wants to be closer to her family, they want me to go to their old school..." his voice trailed off. "I don't have long. I didn't know until an hour ago. I'm sorry that we have to go."

_

_"You aren't coming back?" _

_"No, I don't think so." _

_"Oh, Kev, you're the best friend I have. You're the only friend I have. I'm going to miss you so much." _

_"And I'm going to miss you," he said slowly. "Look up a minute." I looked to where he was pointing. "See that bright star? That's Vega. When you look at that star, think of me. I'll do the same thing. It'll shine the same in England as it does here. It can be a connection between us." _

_"England? That's where you're going?" _

_"Yes." _

_"Will we meet again, someday?" _

_"I hope so. I promise you, though, I'll never forget you, not for all my days." _

_"I never will be able to forget you either." He took my hand, and we stood silently for a time. _

_"I have to go," he said. _

_"So soon?" _

_"Yes." Quickly, he kissed me. Then he turned and walked off. I watched him go. Just as he got to the corner, he turned.

_

_"Goodbye," I whispered, knowing he'd not hear me. He turned the corner and vanished. "Goodbye," I whispered again. I stood there for a while longer before going back inside, to spend the first of many nights where I would wake with tears in my eyes. _

I looked at Kevin now. "How lucky I am," I said to myself. I walked over, bent down, and kissed him. He blinked.

"Kath? What's going on?"

"That's a long story," I laughed. "First, though, I need to apologize."

"For what?"

"For even suspecting that you could be the spy. I should have known better. I love you, Kev."

"I love you, too," he said, his brow knit in confusion. "But what was that about the spy?" I laughed and began to explain.

Lisa

"Well, we know that we can trust them," Jason said. "I'd say that's good, even if we don't know who the spy is."

"There's no time to make more potion," Andy said. "Finals are coming up, and then it's summer break."

"I hope it's not like last year," I muttered. "Once of that is quite enough."

"If you think you can relax, forget it," Andy advised. "Your brother or sister will be coming soon, right? New babies take a lot of work. Your mom will be exhausted, and your dad will be crabby, and the diapers - seventeen a day, at least." He grinned. "But it's worth it. Maybe it'll be twins."

"Are you excited, Jason?" I asked.

"Yeah," he said. "I've always wanted a brother."

"What if it's a girl?"

"Oh, that'll be fine."

"That -the way you said that," I gasped through paroxysms of laughter. "You really think that the baby's going to be a boy?"

"Yes, I do," he said. "But if it's not, that's fine."

"Well, I hope it's a boy, too," I said. "I've had little sisters, and I think a brother would be fun."

"We'll teach him to fly, and play wizard chess, and everything," Jason said excitedly.

"Whoa, hold on, buddy," Andy said. "Do you realize how long it takes babies to grow up?"

"No time at all," I said quietly, to myself. "One day, they're just born and red in your arms, and the next, they're walking and babbling and -" I found tears in my eyes.

"What is it, Lisa?"

"That was just a stray memory. Lily - you know, she really regrets having to leave her son, not getting to see him grow up all the way."

"I know," Jason said. "I understand." He thought a minute. "You look a lot like Lily, you know," he said. "Except you have brown eyes, not green. Your hair - if you did it differently, you'd look just like her."

"How?" I asked.

"Like this," he said, and waved his wand. "Oh, wait, no, like this." I looked in a mirror. I really did look different. More adult, more refined. My hair was piled into a tall braided bun, with a few strands hanging down.

"I've seen her like this," I said. "Where?"

"The wedding," Andy said. "I know I don't look much like Sirius, but I was there. Or he was, whatever. That's the way you wore it at the wedding, with three white lilies in it."

"That's right," Phil said. "You did. How did you remember that James-uh, Jason? I haven't thought of that - well, at all, I guess."

"Just a stray memory," Jason said. His eyes were locked on mine. I could see myself in them. For an instant, something beyond words seemed to pass between us.

"Well," I said, breaking the moment, "I'd best be off to bed before somebody comes to find us."

"Yeah," Jason said. He shook his head a moment, then we all headed for our dorms.

--

Kathryn

"Fiona, I despair of teaching these children anything," I said, waving my hand at the stack of exams I was supposed to grade. "Look at this? Flanagan's written that Muggles use electricity for heating, cooking, and building parking meters. Sanson says that if you ask a policeman for help, he'll make you pay ten percent of whatever money you've got on you, and Curran thinks that metros are another term for breeding cows! Why do they even bother to come to class?"

_You are angry? _

"Not angry, Fiona. Just exasperated. I never get angry."

_That is wise. My clan knows a story of a woman like you, who had a fire in her barely under control. _

"Really? How does it go?"

_We say that she was a worker of wonders, like you, but that one day, a man wronged her. In revenge, she set her powers upon him. He and his army, for he was a powerful warlord, were entirely destroyed.

--

"By one woman?"

_Yes. But the story says that after that, she lost all ability to do any type of magic. _

"I know. That's why I am so careful."

And surely you would never choose to loose your fire.

"It's not voluntary."

_Perhaps I am confused, but the story does say that she decided to set her powers upon him in that way, even knowing that she would lose

them. _

"She must have really hated him." I shuddered. "Maybe these tests aren't so bad after all." I glanced at my watch. "I've got to get these done. Last day of term is tomorrow." Just then, there came a knock at the door. "Come in." I looked around. "Oh, hi, Kev."

"I wanted to ask you about your plans for the summer."

"Haven't got any. I thought I might bum around Europe, act like a Muggle, that sort of stuff."

"I was going to suggest that we do that together."

"That might be fun."

"As a honeymoon." I stared at him.

"Are you suggesting that we get married now?"

"Yes, Kath, I am. I know," he said, holding up a hand to forestall my comments, "We've discussed this before, and we didn't want to because of Voldemort. But, don't you see, by allowing him to dictate our lives, we're letting him win? So we don't know when he's coming back. So what? We make the best of the time we've got."

"It's a bit sudden."

"I know, but we've been engaged for almost a year, and I know that you're the only one I want to marry."

"But -the arrangements, the wedding..."

"Who would you want there?" I thought for a minute.

"The kids, the Blacks -that's about it. You know I don't have many friends. Maybe a few of the teachers." I looked at him. "Tell you what. I don't really want a big wedding at all. You set everything up, and I'll be there."

"You will?"

"Yes, Kev. You're absolutely right, and I'm not going to let Voldemort push me around any more. So just let McGonagall know, get a license, and locate some Ministry official who can preside."

"I was really hoping you'd say that. What do you want to do for a honeymoon?"

"The Alps, Germany, hike through Scotland... I don't care, as long as we're together."

"I'll arrange something then. We'll go up to London on the train, and get married the next day. Then we'll have the whole holidays together. Is there anyone you want there?"

"You."

"Well, besides me."

"Not really. I'd invite the Blacks, but they'll be having a baby right around then, and it's a bit short notice. We don't need anyone, right?"

"Right. I'll let Fiona be bridesmaid, then." I laughed at his joke.

"Well, I'd love to talk more, but I need to grade these tests. You can tell my victims to be grateful to you; I'm in a much better mood now. I just might pass half the class."

"Ah, going easy on the little buggers, are you?"

"I may love teaching, but seeing how little impact I have made is disconcerting."

"I'll leave it to you, then," he said.

_Interlude _

"What have you done?" the dark lord demanded.

"Sire, I thought it was best. It may distract Gray and Noxi, and that will be good."

"Your foolish scheming has endangered my plan. With them married, I may lose a great weapon," Voldemort said. He pointed at the shadowy figure. It spasmed in pain and fell to the floor.

"Please, my lord, no more! Please!"

"You must not fail me again," he said.

"Never, my lord."

"Good. Over the summer, you will make the arrangements I have specified."

"Yes, my lord. Dare I hope that this means that the day of your return is soon?"

"Very. I suppose you wish to know when?"

"If I might be allowed to, my lord."

"I tell you this; in less than six months, my enemies will lie crushed and dead at my feet."

"Oh, my lord, I cannot wait for that day!"

"You must. But your patience will be well rewarded on that day."

"Thank you, my lord."

"You may go now." The figure bowed and walked from the room. Once out, it sagged against the wall in relief. These sessions take a lot out of me. Slowly, raising a hand to her hood, Headmaster Emily McGonagall allowed herself a small smile_. Soon, all my waiting will pay off. Soon, I will be the great lord's underlieutenant and the

most powerful woman in the world. _

_Lisa _

"Hi, Dad!"

"Hi guys!"

"Where's Mum?" Jason looked around confusedly.

"She's at home. With your new brother."

"A brother! He came already?"

"What's he named? What's he look like?"

"Hold on, hold on. Come on, let's go to the car." We followed him out of the station to the waiting car.

"So, what's he like?" I asked, unable to contain myself. "What's his name?"

"His name is William, after your father, Jason. He was born late last night, which is why you didn't know until now. We figured that it would be best just to wait and tell you in person."

"Is he cute?" I asked.

"Well, I think so, but you'll have to decide for yourself. He's very red right now, with black hair. Blue eyes, of course, but no telling what they'll settle on." We plagued him with questions all the way, except for a short time where he asked us about the Manes and how we were doing with that. We explained as best we could, but an awkward silence fell for a moment or two.

When we finally arrived, Dad let us run in without even bothering with our trunks. He said that Aunt Ellie was up in their room with baby Will.

"Hi, Mum!" Jason said as we burst in. "Can we see him?"

"He's over here," she said, laughing at the way we ran to see. I do admit, I felt as if I was about six instead of fourteen, but I'd never had a baby brother before, so I had an excuse.

"He's adorable!" I exclaimed. He really was; small and red, with his eyes all scrunched up. "Can I hold him?"

"When he wakes up," she said. "Jason, what do you think?"

"He's so small." Jason wore a little grin. "But he'll get big fast, right?"

"Yes, he will. Why don't you two go and get your trunks put away?"

"Sure, Mum," I said. I froze for a minute. I'd called her mum! It was true, I did think of her like a mother, but how would she take it?" I looked at her. There were a few tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Lisa," she said. "You don't know how much it means to me for you to have said that."

"Well -Mum, I do think of you as my mother sometimes. You know that my own mother isn't really on good terms with me."

"I know, and that's a shame. And I do think of you as a daughter, Lisa." Dad came in then, and as I looked around the room at the other four people, I felt like I really had a great family. I didn't want anything to ruin that.

_Kathryn _

I woke up slowly, stretching myself in the sunlight. I climbed out of bed and opened the window. Letting the mountain air flow in, I yawned and blinked rapidly.

"I've got coffee on," said a voice, and I felt an arm go around my shoulder. I smiled and leaned back.

"I think I'm going to really like being married to you, Kev," I said.

"How long will it take you to decide that?"

"About thirty seconds. Actually, I decided that thirty seconds after I married you."

"That long?"

"Well, I'm not sure..."

"Come on, let's go have breakfast," he said, kissing me.

"That sounds like a good idea," I said. "Maybe I should put more on."

"Oh, you're fine," he assured me. "Nobody's anywhere near. They assured me that this was the only cabin around for about ten miles. I hope you like hiking."

"I love to walk," I said. "I think too many wizards rely too much on Apparation and forget about other ways of getting places."

"Now, I don't mind walking," Kev said, "but a broom is the only way to travel."

"You miss a lot that way," I said, "but I will allow that there are a great many things good about broom travel. For one thing, even a magical dunce like me can use a broom."

"Hey, you're no dunce," he said firmly, "but you're right. Even Squibs can use some brooms, the highly enchanted models. I suppose that even Muggles could use them."

"Then why doesn't the Ministry have laws about keeping them out of Muggles' hands?" I wondered.

"Hey, look. We may not always want Granny Smith's teapot, but nobody gets rid of a broom. You can make more money selling it to wizards,

even if it's a Comet Ten or an ancient model like that."

"Like a Nimbus?"

"The Nimbus line has historical value," Kev said. "But here we are, on our honeymoon, talking about Muggles and brooms. Can't we think of anything else to discuss?"

"I can think of one or two things," I laughed.

"Yeah," he said, "So can I. Let's go have breakfast." He grinned at the look I gave him. "Then we'll see. I think that the weather this week is supposed to be perfect. We can hike, take a picnic, sleep out under the stars..."

"Sounds very nice and rustic," I said. "Did you order the weather?"

"Of course," he said. "Only the very best for my beautiful bride."

"You're making me blush," I said.

"You're twice as beautiful when you blush," he said. "Which is interesting."

"Why?"

"Because I never knew that perfect could be doubled."

"Oh, Kev. That's so sweet."

"It's true. I didn't marry you because you were beautiful, but it was a nice bonus."

"So why did you marry me?"

"Because I love you," he said simply. "And because I want to spend my life with you."

"I love you, too," I said. "I always have. I always will." Just then, a sound burst in on our reverie.

"Oh, the coffee's boiling over!" Kev exclaimed, and we ran to clean it up.

_Lisa _

Baby Will was so much fun to take care of. He was sweet, happy, and cute. Jason and I had a ball with him that summer. Even though he didn't actually do a whole lot yet, we thought it was a great thing to have a little brother.

We also spent a lot of time outside flying. It was an unusually nice summer; I don't know that it rained more than four times the whole season. Dad said we might have a drought, but we didn't really care. It was just nice to be able to go flying whenever we wanted to.

And the Manes stayed silent all summer. It seemed that we were just going to be able to relax and have fun, like normal children. The

last three weeks of August, Andy and Phil stayed with us.
> "Don't you have any girl friends at school?" Dad had asked me.
<o:p><o:p>

"No. I like these guys. And Aunt Kath is there, too. She's nice. But I am not quite like the other girls."

"I can see how that would be," Aunt Ellie said. "I'm just glad that you seem to be having a nice time there."

"Oh, it's wonderful, Mum," I assured her. "I'm really happy. Even if we do have to worry about Voldemort sometimes, we still have fun."

"Do you know when he'll be coming?" Dad asked.

"No," Jason said. "We've haven't got a clue. We'll know when he attacks, not before. Although I think it will be soon, personally."

"Me too," I said. " That's the feeling I get from Lily."

"How soon?" Dad asked.

"I can't tell," Jason said. "None of us can."

"If there's anything that you need me to do..." Dad said.

"Have you told Minister Wood?"

"A dozen times. He thinks that I'm crazy. There's really not anything I can do now about him."

"Too bad," Jason said. "But we talk about things constantly, trying to think up a plan of defense."

"What have you come up with?"

"Nothing," I said. "We're going to be playing it by ear. We do know his weaknesses, and we'll try to exploit them, but we don't know how it will go. Except that we plan to come out alive and Voldemort dead."

The summer seemed to fly past, and in seemingly no time at all, we were heading back to Hogwarts. For some reason, I felt very apprehensive the whole trip. But I shook it off fast enough during the feast, and by the time it was time for bed, I felt much better. Maybe, we'd have a normal year this year. And maybe not.

Kathryn

"What a gorgeous sunset," I said, watching the sun sink low behind a nearby mountain. Kevin and I were seated atop a mountain not far from our cabin. We'd hiked up, but our brooms lay beside us. We'd be going down the fast way.

"I can hardly believe it's time to go back to England," Kev said.

"It has been an incredible summer, hasn't it?" I said. "Maybe we can come back next summer."

"Maybe," he said. "I'd enjoy that, myself." He stretched and sighed. "We'd better get back. We'll want an early start tomorrow."

Interlude

Invisible, they flitted in like great bats, flying low and hovering over the ground. In dozens they came, malevolent, cruel, and impatient. They were drawn to Hogwarts like moths to a flame. Evil reeked from them, and a shadow seemed to emanate from them.

Brightly, they came to Hogwarts. Like golden shadows, like visual song, they came, dancing on the wind. They came in dozens too, beneficent, merciful, and determined. They were drawn like metal to a magnet, like trout returning home. Where they went, joy went, and people who were near their path sang for joy.

Two kinds of spirits and fey began to descend on Hogwarts, one bright and lovely, one foul and dark. They came and arrayed themselves into two great armies, waiting only for their commanders to begin the struggle that they had been awaiting for so many years.

Only one army would win, and only one army survive. The battle would determine which that was. There would be no quarter.

Beneath them, the world was peacefully oblivious.

Lisa

"It is coming."

The force of that thought nearly blinded me for a second. Avril Nelson, who was partnering me in Charms, stared at me as I put a hand to my head.

"Are you all right?" she asked, worried.

"Fine," I said, smiling bravely. "My head just hurt there for a minute."

"Lily? What is coming? Lily?" But she had gone. I noticed that Jason, Andy and Phil looked distracted as well.

Late that night, as I was about to drift off to sleep, another sending came to me. "Voldemort is coming, very soon."

"How soon?" I asked back.

"I don't know. Less than a year, more than a week."

I hurried down to the common room. The boys were already there.

"Did she tell you that Voldemort was coming, too?" Andy asked. I nodded.

"D'you think we should tell Gray and -er, well, both of them?" I stumbled, forgetting for a minute that, being married, they were both now named Gray. Phil laughed briefly.

"Tomorrow, I think. We've got Defense anyway, we'll let him know then."

By this time, we were so paranoid that every student seemed likely to be a spy - even someone as ridiculous as 'Bo' Creevey. He was still wandering around, jabbering on about Harry Potter and other famous dead people, but we couldn't rule him out as a spy.

"It could be really, really good cover," Andy had suggested.

"Look, Padfoot, you are totally discredited when it comes to finding spies," Jason had laughed. "But you're right, he could still be it." So we were very surreptitious about arranging for a meeting with the Professors Gray. I included a note in with my homework - _Important, must speak with you as soon as possible._ They made me use mine because I had the longest essay.

"How do you do it?" Jason had asked, holding up his three parchment sheets. "You've got five there. We all researched the same stuff, how'd you get so much more?"

"Girls are just naturally better writers," I said, my nose in the air. Then I burst down laughing at the looks on the boys' faces.

Anyway, we were walking back to the castle after Care of Magical Creatures when Fiona flew up to us.

"Hey, she's back!" Phil exclaimed. The bird had apparently been gone since June; Kath didn't know where, but was sure she'd take care of herself. Fiona held a note in her beak.

"Wow. She must know that it's important," I said as I took the note from the bird. "From what I understand, falcons can be very touchy when asked to do owls' work."

"That reminds me!" Andy clapped a hand to his forehead. "I've got to send a letter to Mum and Dad, let them know how I'm doing. They worry when I don't," he said, looking wryly at us.

"And they got you that nice owl for your birthday," Jason reminded him. "Although I don't understand the name."

"Wol? It's kind of a joke," Andy said. "From a Muggle book Mum read to me when I was younger."

"Okay," Phil said. He didn't much care for Muggle stuff. "What does the note say?"

"Come and have tea with us after your classes are over," I read from the page. "Well, we're done, so we'd better go now."

Kathryn and Kevin had been given a nice suite somewhere near the top of the castle by the headmistress. It wasn't very large, but it was big enough to have us in for tea. We'd never have found it without the Marauders' Map, though. That piece of parchment was so useful...

I can remember how shocked Lily was when she found out about that, and all the other things her friends had been up to.

"So, what important news do you have for us?" Kevin asked as Kathryn poured tea. "I assume it has something to do with the Manes?"

"Yes," Jason said, having adopted his role as speaker for us. "Voldemort is coming, and soon."

"How soon?" Kath asked, her knuckles going white as she increased her grip on the teapot.

"We don't know. Between a week and a year. I think sooner rather than later."

"If we use some logic, we might be able to narrow things down a bit," Kevin said. "When would he be more likely to come back?" We stared at each other.

"He'll want it to be remembered, when he takes over the world," I said finally. "There'll be a reason why he picks whatever day he does. We just have to figure out what kind of logic the guy uses."

"He's vindictive," Phil said. "We know that, right? So he might pick a day when he feels that he revenges himself simply by being there."

"A day when he is strong," Andy said. "Some times are more favorable than others. I wouldn't expect him on Christmas, because days like that have their own kind of magic, and it's not a kind that he'd like."

"There are days of the other sort," I said.

"Halloween," Jason said suddenly. "Day of his greatest defeat, and traditionally the day when the barrier between this world and the next is thinnest."

"Of course," I whispered. "I'll wager that it will be on Halloween."

"That's a month away," Kathryn said. "Does that give us time to prepare for anything?"

"Yes," Jason said. "Get our parents -no, not Mum. She's got to take care of Will. Get Dad up here. Get anyone else who believes you. We'll need all the help we can get."

"I've got a few favors I can pull in," Kevin said. "And one or two old friends who I might be able to persuade to come for a weekend - Halloween is on a Saturday. We'll get backup for you."

"And we'll help in anything we can," Kath said. "Just tell us what."

Kathryn

I had been very nervous, thinking about Voldemort's return, but after

we thought that we had a date settled on, I wasn't quite so afraid. Maybe it was because I had so many other things to worry about that I didn't have time. Maybe I was just more ready to face reality now that it was truly upon me. Whatever the reason, I didn't worry much at all for the next few weeks.

Then suddenly, it was the night before. The mood at the school seemed to have grown very tense over the last few weeks, but that might have been my imagination. I couldn't sleep that night, and paced up and down our parlor. Fiona rapped on the window, and I went to let her in.

You should not be awake so late, she said, fixing me with her glare._ You need to sleep, especially at this time. _

"I don't need you to mother me," I said. "I've been sleeping plenty-and eating enough, before you start in on that."

_Have you told your mate? _

"No, you know I've told you why. Look, Fiona, you should go. It could get dangerous here. I don't want you risking your life."

It is my choice, and I choose to stay here. Those Who Command the Winds may have need of me.

"True, and I'm glad that you stay." She seemed about to reply, when a cold wind shrieked in. I slammed the window shut.

"My goodness, that was cold!" I looked at the clock. Midnight.

Then the howling started. It was soft at first, but it got louder and louder. Something seemed to be flying around the castle and screaming. I looked out the window. Suddenly, an awful face appeared, and I screamed, stumbling back in fear. "Kev!"

"I'm right here. That howling woke me up." I turned to see him in a dressing gown.

"I think it's started," I managed calmly.

"Go and get the kids. I'll join you in the Great Hall." He went to put on his robes. I, having never removed mine, headed straight for Gryffindor Tower.

Lisa

"Now!" a voice screamed from inside my head. "Oh, no! Not him!" I awoke suddenly. A furious screaming was outside my window. The other girls in my dorm stared out the window.

"What do you think it is?" Avril asked, quaveringly.

"An attack," I said grimly, pulling on my robes and grabbing my wand. "You might as well come. I don't think anyone will get any more sleep tonight."

The common room was full when I got there.

"Lisa!" Jason called from across the room.

"I'm fine! Is it starting, you think?"

"Definitely. We're all sure." He emphasized all considerably to let me know that he meant the Manes, too.

"We'd best get going, then," I said.

"Where?" Andy asked. They'd pushed their way to my side now.

"What's going on?" We saw Bo standing in the center of the room, his wand at his side. "Can I help?" I looked at the boys. Andy and Phil were looking at each other, but Jason seemed lost in thought; he was, I was sure, talking to James. Suddenly, he jumped up on a table.

"You want to know what's going on?" he asked, waving his wand. "I'll tell you. Something evil is attacking this castle. Something bad, that everyone thought was long gone. He's going to try to win everything tonight, right here. He's very powerful, and very evil. He might win, but I'm going to try to stop him. Does anyone here care to help?" Everyone looked puzzled.

"I'm with you," I said, stepping forward. Of course, he knew that, but I knew that to the frightened students around me, such an act might inspire bravery in them.

"Me too," Phil said.

"And me!" Andy added.

"Count me in!" Bo squeaked, voice breaking with excitement. And then every voice in the room added itself to the throng.

"Follow me!" Jason yelled, leaping off the table and heading for the portrait hole. Andy, Phil and I were right after him. Just as we reached it, it swung open. Kath was standing there, wand at the ready. She looked slightly bemused, but waved to us to follow.

We followed her all the way to the Great Hall, which was now filling with students and teachers.

"There's no way Voldemort will attack here," Jason said, looking around. "Too many people." Then the door burst open, and my dad and other men stood in it. Kathryn went to explain to them. I looked around, trying to see if everyone was there.

"A few of the older students are missing," I said. "Mostly Slytherin, but there are some from every House gone. And the Headmistress isn't here."

"Where are they?" Andy asked.

"I've got the Map," Phil said, producing it and starting it up. "They are in the dungeons," he said happily, pointing to them.

"Is Voldemort on the Map?" I asked.

"No," Phil said. "He might not register on it, or he might not be

here yet."

"Come on," Jason said. "We'd best check out what's going on."

Kathryn

From across the room, I saw the four kids walk out. Where are they going? I asked myself. I looked back at the men I had been speaking to.

"I've got to go, now. Patrick, you'd better come."

"It's the kids, isn't it?" Patrick Black said as we jogged off in the direction I had seen them leave.

"I don't know where they're going, but they might need help," I said. We rushed into the entrance hall. It was empty, except for Kev. He was hurtling down the stairs.

"Did you see which way they went?" I asked.

"To the dungeons. I called for them to stop, but they either didn't hear or didn't listen." The three of us rushed off together.

When we caught up to the kids, they were huddled around an open door into the Potions dungeon.

"What's going on?" Patrick asked, striding forward.

"Dad!" Lisa exclaimed. "Oh, I'm glad you guys are here. Take a look."

The room was full of a sickly green light. I could make out various shapes, moving and chanting something that did not quite reach my ear.

"It's sealed," Jason said, as Kev tried to go through the door.

"What are they doing?" I wondered aloud.

"Summoning Voldemort," Jason said grimly. "They're all working for him."

"Of course -it was McGonagall who was the spy!" I hadn't even suspected her. "Can we stop them?"

"If we were in there," Kev began. I turned to the kids, about to ask them to stand back while we tried to blast the door open.

"What's wrong with them?" I shrieked. They were all sitting against the floor, eyes unseeing, staring ahead.

"They're alive," Patrick said quickly. He took Lisa's wrist. "Pulse is steady, they're all breathing."

"There was no curse laid on them," Kev said. "It must have something to do with the Manes."

"Lisa said to me, once, that the Manes would take on Voldemort in the spirit world, while we battled him here. They must have gone there."

"Then we'd best get this door open," Patrick said. "There's nothing we can do to help them here. We've got to help them fight." As one, we leveled our wands and blasted the door. It stood firm. Again we blasted, and this time, the enchantment crumbled. The chanting stopped, and the followers of Voldemort looked up at us. McGonagall raised her wand at us.

"Expelliarmus!" Patrick bellowed, and her wand flew across the room, leaving her looking startled. Kev was muttering something under his breath. Suddenly, all the students froze. McGonagall dived for her wand.

"Great, she knows how to block that one," Kev muttered. "Let's see how she takes this!" He raised his wand to do something, but she had reached hers and blocked it.

Suddenly I noticed a great crystal in the center of the room. It seemed to be the source of all the green light, and it pulsed and flowed with a life of its own. I realized what it was: a Summoning Stone. That's how they were calling Voldemort. I looked around. A few of the students had regain mobility, and Patrick was taking them on. Kev was still engaged in a duel with the headmistress.

Taking a deep breath, I crossed to where the Stone sat. It felt evil, even from this distance. I reached out and touched it.

The world seemed to freeze. I saw Patrick, who had been turning from one opponent to the next, standing like a statue. Kev was blocking a spell that hung frozen in the air above him. McGonagall's face was contorted into a dreadful, frozen mask.

And then I became aware of things I had not seen before. We humans were not the only creatures in the dungeons. There were - beings made of light, darting about the room while all else was frozen. And great shadows, or places of anti-light, struggling in some terrible way with the light-creatures. Then I could hear the battle, too; not like any battle anyone has ever heard. It was music. Great chords and phrases of rapturously beautiful sound flowed around me, and the opposition was like discord, striving to destroy the beautiful sounds. And I became aware of four distinct musical themes running through, and as I became aware of the, I could see the spirits to which they belonged. The Manes had joined the battle, and my friends were surely with them. For a moment, it seemed that they would triumph, and the music swelled. But then came the greatest discord of all, and the room seemed to go black. At once, I knew what it was.

Voldemort had arrived.

Lisa

As I was standing at the door, I felt funny, suddenly. I was about to call out when I was no longer standing in the dungeons.

I stood in a vast, bare room. Three others were there; as I looked, their faces flashed between those of my friends and those of the

Manes, I was sure something similar was happening to me.

"The hour has come at last," Andy -or was it Sirius? said.

"Are we ready for battle?" I asked, and suddenly I could feel Lily there. But this was different from the other times. All those times, I felt as if there were two people in my head. This time, we were one. There was no difference between Lisa and Lily at all.

"Ready or not, we must join the battle," Jason said.

Suddenly, the scene shifted again. I could see the dungeon. My father was busy fighting several students; Gray was taking on the Headmaster. Kath had touched an object I knew must be the Summoning Stone -the device that would bring Voldemort here. All the other figures were cloudy, but she was clear. There were spirits, too; good and evil joined in battle. I cannot describe how we thought; unless you had done such a thing, you would be unable to understand, and if you have had such a battle, not description is necessary. But we fought, and for a time -a second? A year? It was all very much the same in that place - we seemed to win.

And then Voldemort arrived. I could see him, not as a human, but as a great blackness, a void, an evil. At once we turned from his minions to him, fighting as hard as we could.

I truly wish that I could describe what we went through, but I cannot find the words. We teetered on the edge of eternity, now winning, now losing. Time had stopped, or was flowing fast around us. We struggled against him for a long time. But finally, it seemed that he would win. He was the stronger.

Of course, we did not give up. We were determined, I know, to fight to the death, for even if we couldn't win we wanted to damage him as much as we could. I was growing weaker. He sensed it, and turned to me.

_I offered once to let you live if you would not stand up to me. I offer you the same chance. _

_Do you think I'm a fool, Voldemort? Is a promise from you worth anything? And even if it were not, I'd never stop fighting you. Life is not too high a price to pay to stop you. _

_Then again will you die, foolish girl, and this time nothing of you will survive. _

He turned to strike at me. I knew I was about to die, and poured out my every effort to hurt him. I could feel my friends doing the same, but it just wasn't enough.

I closed my eyes, waiting for the end.

But it never came.

Kathryn

I could see they were in desperate trouble. "What can I do?" I asked myself. "How can I help them?"

How high a price will you pay? A small voice asked me.

"Anything! Anything! Just -I've got to help stop him!"

You already know the answer, Kathryn. Everything you need is inside you. I knew, in that instant, exactly what was meant. I knew what an awful choice I faced. But - "So be it." And I did the unthinkable.

Lisa

Suddenly, a great wash of light passed over me. I could not see, but I could hear. A great rush of the most beautiful music ever played accompanied the light. I heard a scream, as of death, and a great weight seemed to be lifted from me. I opened my eyes.

I was sitting outside the dungeons. Jason, Andy and Phil were looking about too. We jumped up and rushed in.

Dad and Gray were looking around, puzzled. All of Voldemort's supporters were down, dead or unconscious.

"You did it!" Gray said.

"No," Jason denied. "It wasn't us. Not at the last." We turned, to look for Kath.

She stood, huddled, over a pile of shards. They must have come from the Stone. She looked up.

"You did that?" Gray asked. "How?" Then I noticed the tears running down her face.

"They're gone!" she cried. "All my powers are gone!" And she ran from the room, sobbing.

_Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. _

_ - Psalm 30:5_

Lisa

We four were alone in the common room. Everyone else was still in the Great Hall or the dungeons, settling things down. Now the four of us were alone. Fitting that it should end the way it had begun.

I was still both Lisa and Lily, but I could feel the parts becoming more distinct. And I knew that Lily's time was almost gone, and I knew that she-or I -wanted to say goodbye properly.

"Well, it's been fun while it lasted." Andy might be speaking, but I knew that the words were from Sirius.

"Oh, Padfoot, old friend." James embraced him, and then Remus. We all had a few tears in our eyes.

"Time to leave this world for the ones it belongs to," Remus said gruffly. "We've been here long enough."

_Lily, how will I do without you? _

_Just fine, Lisa. You never really needed me. Just do your best. And do what you can for poor Kathryn. She'll need your help, I think. Good luck. _

_Thank you. _

_Thank you, dear Lisa. Keep an eye on the boys. They'll need your help -I know. _

_I will. _

James took Lily in his arms.

"I love you," they said together, and then laughed.

"What now?" Lily asked.

"I don't know. Maybe oblivion, maybe not. Are you scared?"

"No. Even oblivion sounds fine if we're together. We will be, won't we?"

"Forever, my dearest."

"Then I'm not afraid." She shivered. "Is it time?"

"Yes." He spoke very quietly. She took tight hold of his hands. Remus and Sirius each put a hand on their shoulders.

"Shall we go together then?"

"I think so."

It seemed as if half of me died in that instant. The tearing sensation, the feeling of loss, was so great that I almost cried out.

But suddenly I didn't feel it so much. And I realized that I had both sets of memories; I could remember my own childhood, and also Lily's. She hadn't gone completely; she would be with me forever, in a sense. She left a sense of calm, and I realized just how tired she had been.

Goodbye, Lily, and thank you. We four looked at each other, and I saw in their eyes the same thankfulness that I felt.

"Well, they're gone," I said slowly.

"Lisa -your eyes!" Jason exclaimed.

"What?" I asked, for I could feel nothing wrong. Andy turned me around and made me look in a mirror. My eyes, once dark brown, now shone emerald green.

"How could that happen?" Phil asked.

"I'm not sure. But I think it was partly to ensure I'll never forget. Which I never will."

Kathryn

I sat in my room like a child, crying. What was the point of going on? I'd lost my magic. I wasn't a witch anymore, I was a Muggle, pure and simple. I couldn't teach, I knew that. And I couldn't live among wizards, not like this.

It wasn't fair. I'd had to give up my magic. I would never fly again, never cast a spell or speak to a bird or do anything again. I wished that I was dead.

Kev came in.

"Kath," he said, and looked at me. I turned away.

"Kath, I know that it's an awful thing that's happened to you. I can't imagine what it would be like. But Kath, I still love you. I told you before that I'd have loved you even if you were a Muggle. I love you, I always will."

"I can't do anything," I said. "I can't even levitate that feather. Any first year can do that, but I can't. I'll never do magic again."

"It's too soon to say that," he said, trying to offer me hope.

"No, it's not. I know the truth. Never again will I do any magic. Go away. I never want to see you or any wizard again."

I locked the door and didn't come out for I don't know how long. Food appeared a few times and I ate, but mostly I slept and cried.

After a long, long time I heard a tapping on the window. I opened it and Fiona soared in. She perched on her bar and looked at me.

"You'd best find a new mistress," I muttered, knowing that she would no longer understand me. But:

I like you just fine, she said quite plainly. I stared. _I don't care what you can't do, you're still my flight-sister_. How could it be? I snatched up my wand and tried to move the feather, but couldn't. The tiny spark of hope in me died. So I had been spared my Eyrespeech, but nothing else. I was still unfit to live among wizards. I would pack my bags, take Fiona, and go. I'd leave completely. Kev could get on with his life, I'd go and hide somewhere, pretend that wizards were make-believe and Voldemort never existed.

"No," I said. "I'll not make you stay with me. Go, fly free." She just sat there. "Don't you understand me? Go!"

No, she said, quite firmly. _I stay with you_.

"All right then, you stupid bird," I said. "You can come." I carried my bags down to the hall. No one seemed to see me. But just as I was about to leave:

"Kath!" Kevin strode toward me. "Where are you going?"

"I have to leave," I said. "I can't stay here any more. I'm a Muggle now, remember?"

"You can't leave," he said. "I won't let you."

"Kev, you don't need a Muggle wife. What good would I be to you?"

"If you go now, I'll never be happy, my whole life," he said simply. "I love you." He took my bags from me. "And you can't leave. You have a job here, remember?"

"How can I teach? I've lost my powers."

"Don't be stupid. You don't need magic to teach Muggle Studies. And you can't think that we'd let you go like this, can you?"

"We?"

"Me and a few others."

"Don't go, Aunt Kath." I turned to see Lisa there, looking pale but sure.

"Don't go," the three boys seconded. I looked around. The hall seemed to have filled with people. There were most of the students at Hogwarts, and a few that I had taught but had graduated. Every teacher stood in the hall, even Snape. Patrick and Ellen Black stood arm in arm not far away, their young son cradled in her arms. Even Minister Wood was there. He stepped forward.

"All of you who participated in stopping You -oh, well, Voldemort - have been granted the Order of Merlin."

"But I'm not a witch," I said in bewilderment.

"You think we'll take that as an excuse to let you turn your back on your friends and responsibilities?" Kevin looked shocked. "And besides, I need your help in other things too."

"Like what?"

"Well, I've been made the Headmaster of this school, and I am not going to accept the post unless you stay." I looked around at all the faces. Yes, I could leave them. Leave and go back to a dreary world of no magic. And, after all, how much magic did I need? I'd still be able to fly on a broom, maybe, and I still had Fiona. And I still had Kevin. Yes, I still had him...

"One question," I said to Kev.

"Yes?"

"If you're Headmaster, and our child breaks a rule, will you give him detention?"

"Well, I -wait, that -was that a hypothetical question or were you saying - "

"Our child, Kev. I found out a few days before the attack, I didn't

want you to have anything else to worry about." I found myself crying. "We're going to have a baby."

"Then you'll stay here?"

"Yes." I heard a cheer from the crowd. Kev put his arms around me and kissed me.

Maybe things won't be so bad after all. I always had hope.

Epilogue

The two women sat across from each other nervously in the coffeeshop. You'd never have guessed that they were related, but they were.

"So, Grace," the younger said finally, "Are you well?"

"I am. And you, Kath? It's been a long time since I've seen you."

"More than fifteen years."

"I think, perhaps, that I was wrong about some of the things I said the last time we met."

"Some?"

"All right, all."

"Well, I'm all right. I'm a witch no longer. I lost my powers a few years ago."

"How?"

"A battle. That was the price of winning."

"How are you doing?"

"Just fine. I still teach, and my husband and I have a son and a daughter. And another on the way." She smiled. "At least they'll be wizards, and normal ones."

"How is -my daughter?"

"She's doing very well. You should be proud of her. She's Head Girl this year, and one of the youngest people ever granted the Order of Merlin. Very smart, and very friendly. She's one of the most popular girls in the school."

"Has she got any plans?"

"I rather think she'll be getting married in not too long. He -Jason Potter -is Head Boy, and they make quite a nice couple."

"Potter? Like Ellen, my ex-husband's old girlfriend?"

"Her son. She and Patrick married, and have a son together."

"I see. But Lisa is happy?"

"Very. There was some business back a few years ago, but that's over. She -she wrote you a letter. Asked me to give it to you. I think she feels badly over some of the things she said when you last met."

"We both do."

"She was very young, you know, and felt betrayed. You might think about trying to reconcile."

"I will. I guess not all wizards are bad."

"No more than all Muggles are."

"Well, it's nice to see you, Kath."

"Very nice to see you, Grace."

"Do you remember that time we went to DC?"

"And you got us lost in the subway?"

"I thought that was your fault."

"Maybe so." Kath laughed suddenly as she turned her head toward someone who wasn't there. "I keep forgetting that Fiona isn't here. My falcon, you know. She's off raising a nest this summer, and I keep missing her."

"Oh -that's my husband. I have to go."

"Write to me." Kath pressed her sister's hand for a moment. "There's a lot we should tell each other."

"I will," the other promised.

END

This is, quite simply, a story that grew in the telling. I had in mind when I wrote it a short story about a girl who finds out she's a wizard. Because I rarely, especially at that time, wrote stories with Harry in them, I decided to put her in the future.

** **

Unfortunately about three days into the project I became aware that there were several other writers doing very similar things. Not being someone who likes doing what everyone else is, I decided to complicate things up a bit. Thus, the Manes appeared, though they didn't have a name until Blaise suggested mane " Latin for spirit. They're entirely my creation and I'm rather proud of them.

** **

**And Kath, Kev and Fiona? Fiona at least was in a very lousy story I wrote once, my first fanfic that I wrote before PoA came out and had the wisdom to never post. It had only two redeeming things; Fiona, and a magical map that showed where everything was in Hogwarts. It

wasn't as complicated as the Marauder's Map, but I did think of it on my own. Kath and Kev " well, they're real in a way that most of my characters are not. The real Kevin is a lot more like Sirius Black than the one in my story, and the real Kath has many of the same views as the one in my story. The names were changed some, just because I thought it was a good idea.**

** **

Thanks a lot for reading my story. I'm glad to have had a chance to make a few changes, clear up some loose ends and misspellings that have been plaguing me.

** **

J K Rowling is the author of _Harry Potter_. Anything that does not come from her books is my creation. Please ask before taking.

End
file.